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# Succession Planning For K–12 Leadership: Educators' Perceptions Of A Public School District Leadership Development Program

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SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR K–12 LEADERSHIP:  
EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT  
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

By

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A DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

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Portland, Maine

April 2019

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April 2019  
Educational Leadership

SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR K–12 LEADERSHIP:  
EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

ABSTRACT

An overarching problem that public school districts are facing is a lack of succession planning. Without a succession plan in place, districts are not prepared for the future when it comes to staff development. This lack of foresight and planning causes a ripple effect leading to insufficient leadership. A district-level leadership development program could lessen this burden by providing support for educators with exposure to leadership skills at a school or district level prior to earning an advanced degree. This researcher used a collective case study methodology to investigate a common experience across multiple perspectives. This study utilized demographic questionnaires, semi structured interviews, and physical artifacts with a three-stage analysis process of in vivo coding, constant comparative method, and cross-case analysis combined with a nonindexical analysis of the physical artifacts. The researcher's goal was to examine a group of individuals who had participated in a district-level leadership development program within the past five years to gain a holistic view of the perspectives of educators who engaged in the leadership development program and how participants describe their leadership development experience. Furthermore, the researcher explored the perceived benefits the program had on their

professional growth and development personally. The researcher found that the leadership development program brought together like-minded individuals searching to better themselves through fostering an environment of collaboration. The program supported a network of teambuilding. The use of applicable features in the leadership development program gave the participants the ability to connect theory to real life. Furthermore, all participants of the interviews found that the program could be more supportive if the leadership development program differentiated more to meet the individual's needs and goals.

University of New England

Doctor of Education

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Preparing students for the future is the main purpose of public school districts (Arizona Department of Education, 2018). Across Arizona, K–12 schools promote their mission and vision statements to not only attract and retain students, but to promote their worth to the public that surrounds them. Often, their objectives include such concepts and phrases as “producing lifelong learners,” “excellent education,” and “positively impact the world” (Arizona Department of Education, 2018). To accomplish these missions or visions for the future, public school districts across the state need to look at their districts holistically to address an essential step of the process: succession planning (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Riddick, 2018). Succession planning is defined as “. . . the process of preparing individuals within an organization to take over leadership positions at some point in the future” (Succession Planning, 2015, para. 1). K–12 leadership succession planning is very similar to succession planning in corporations, but the stakes are higher when the decisions made affect children. The implementation of a long-term plan that also has little to no negative effect on students is vital. Capozzi (2017) describes this mindset as “growth mindset”—the idea that people have the possibility to reach their true potential with the right motivation and training.

Pink (2011) suggested that the model of incentives and punishment, or the carrot-and-stick mentality, that has been used for the past century is becoming irrelevant. The science behind the drive of personal motivation does not support the carrot-and-stick motivational tool for the 21st-century worker. Pink (2011) found that a new approach that utilizes autonomy, mastery, and purpose is needed to support drive in an employee. A Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (2013) survey supports Pink's (2011) theory by surveying more than 1,000 teachers

and found that educators were more engaged when given the ability to have autonomy toward a purposeful goal that is mutually beneficial to both their career and the school/district. Capozzi (2017) goes further by describing the mindset of employees in the 21st century as a “growth mindset.” A person with a sense of curiosity continues to grow and develop to reach their fullest potential.

The goal of this study was to provide data-driven knowledge to support the growth of educators' leadership in education so that school districts can develop successful succession plans. Through this process, the researcher examined the experience of past participants who took part in a district-level leadership development program. For the purpose of confidentiality, the district and program name were given pseudonyms. The program was called the Leadership Academy and its purpose was to cultivate future leaders in the Edwards Renee Unified School District. Through the use of a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and physical artifacts the researcher examined the participants' perspectives of their leadership development experience at a district level. Semi-structured interviews gave the researcher the ability to collect data on what the participants said and supported a clearer picture of what the participant meant. Furthermore, the researcher collected physical artifacts through the use of digital photography and asked participants to explain their artifact during the semi-structured interview.

The focus was on a large school district in Arizona. The school district consists of 400 square miles crossing at least six different cities in the metropolitan area of Phoenix, Arizona. The student enrollment rate is approximately 34,000 K–12 and about 1,200 preschool students within approximately 40 schools. Additionally, this district employs approximately 4,000 employees, with a student to teacher ratio of 18:1 (Niche, 2018).



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore how leadership development is experienced by educators who completed a district level teacher leadership development program. Further, this study seeks to examine how participants perceive their growth as leaders as a result of their learning. Through the use of a cross-sectional, collective case study the researcher gained an understanding of obstacles to succession planning for K–12 leadership from their perspective. Overall, the research will add knowledge about the professional growth of teachers into leadership positions at a district level and support the broader knowledge base of succession planning for the field of education.

### **Problem Statement**

An overarching problem public school districts face is a lack of succession planning (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Without a succession plan in place, districts are not prepared for the future when it comes to staff development. This lack of foresight and planning causes a ripple effect leading to insufficient leadership. Brundrett, Rhodes, and Gkolia (2006) suggest that this lack of foresight equates to inadequate support for teachers transitioning into leadership positions at a district level. Additionally, Brundrett et al. (2006) argue that districts could support educators by providing exposure to leadership skills at a school or district level prior to earning an advanced degree. Teoh and Coggins (2013) found that teachers wanted to stay in the classroom while improving the education system. Furthermore, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Survey found that 51% of teachers were open to the idea of teaching part-time or a combination of teaching with leadership responsibility in their schools or at the district level (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2013).

There are many obstacles and issues that the education system in the State of Arizona must address, including bureaucracy, budget cuts, teacher shortages, and the changing needs of students and staff (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2013). One could argue that developing teachers to become leaders is not as important as test scores, but Collins (2001) suggested that one way to achieve stability within an organization is to invest in its employees. The ability to avoid outsourcing for leadership and grow leaders from within an organization is more profitable for the organization, and it makes their employees feel more valuable. In turn, they feel more invested in the company, thereby giving the organization greater longevity (Collins, 2001). Pink (2011) expands on this concept by suggesting that “human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined and connected to one another” (p. 71). Companies could support this inner drive by investing time and money in the employee.

### **Significance of the Study**

Traditional leadership development programs in education focus on principals or assistant principals (Alvoid & Black, 2014). This study is significant because it gained insight from educators who become or who will become positional leaders within a school district. All participants have participated in a district level program on leadership that is different from other programs offered at the collegiate level. For example, Arizona State University offers advanced degrees in educational leadership at a high cost but participants have to select a track for their career direction (Arizona State University, 2018). The district program is free to the participant and allows the participant to explore different avenues before committing their time and money. Furthermore, this program takes into consideration novice leaders and incorporates them into their program as a subgroup, which is different than the traditional leadership model. For example, an instructional coach can be included in the program whereas a traditional leadership

development program focuses on candidates on an administration path (Arizona State University, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The overarching questions that were examined through this research are:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How do public, K–12 educators describe their leadership development as a result of a district-level leadership development program?

RO<sub>2</sub>: What aspects of leadership development do K–12 educators perceive as most beneficial to their professional growth and development?

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012), a conceptual framework is defined as the “overarching argument for the work—both why it is worth doing and how it should be done” (p. 8). These authors suggest that the use of topical research, literature review, and theoretical frameworks provide the superstructure that creates an overarching conceptual framework for a study. Furthermore, the conceptual framework is a living document that evolves or changes over the course of the study (Maxwell, 2012).

Symbolic interactionism theory explains social behavior in terms of how people interact by way of symbols. This theory focuses on a small-scale perspective of interactions among individuals to objects, events, ideas and other people. The theory is based on the teachings of George Herbert Mead in the early 20th century. Mead believed that people constantly evolve in the social process through the meaning they place on things. Additionally, a person alters the way they behave based on the interactions they have with the world around them. Herbert Bloomer continued Mead’s work and labeled his theory *symbolic interactionism*. He proposed three tenets to explain symbolic interactionism: a) action depends on meaning, b) different

people assign different meaning to people, places, and things, and c) that the meaning of something can change (Blumer, 1986).

Armstrong (2015) conducted a study of four novice leaders becoming vice principals in a public school district. This study inspired the researcher to explore past participants' experiences of a leadership development program through qualitative methods using a collective case study approach. This gave the researcher the ability to ask probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the past participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations, and Scope**

Assumptions of a study are items that the researcher assumes to be true (Creswell, 2009). Based on this definition the researcher was able to obtain participants willing to engage in the study who were honest with their responses during the data collection process. Another assumption was that the participants had different perspectives about their experiences in the district leadership development program. Furthermore, the researcher assumed that responses from the sample group would range from positive to negative.

Limitations of a study are those areas out of the researcher's control (Creswell, 2009). One limitation to the study was that the participants have had different life experiences prior to and since the district leadership development program, which may impact how they experienced the leadership program, and what their goals in attending were. Second, there was a difference in the number of years of experience, grade level taught, age, and level of education of the participants, which may impact their thoughts on leadership and succession planning. Finally, the response of the participants may not be truthful, or the response may be skewed by the presence of an interviewer.

Delimitations are parts of the study over which researchers have control that limits the scope of the study (Creswell, 2009). The first delimitation of this study was that the researcher utilized a collective case study methodology. Collective case studies utilize a small sample size with purposive or criterion sampling. Examining a small group of participants' perspective experience through symbolic interactionism theory also delimits the study. Furthermore, the researcher is an employee of the district that is under examination and a past participant of the district leadership development program, giving the researcher insight that needs to be “bracketed” not to impose a personal view on the study (Creswell, 2013).

The scope of the research was on participants of one public school district's educators to examine a leadership development program called the Leadership Academy. The academy requires all potential members to apply. All applicants must have at least three years of teaching experience and have a desire to become a leader within the next two years. The sample size for this research was limited to the participants of the program within the past five years.

### **Definitions**

*Educators:* Teachers and “education support personnel cover a wide range of professional, administrative, technical, and general staff working within the education sector, such as teaching assistants, school nurses, and psychologists, bursars, and bus drivers, among others” (*Education International*, 2017, para. 1).

*Growth mindset:* A growth mindset is a concept that people have the possibility to reach their true potential with the right motivation and training (Capozzi, 2018).

*Job shadowing:* A person in one position follows someone in a different position to get a deeper understanding of that person's position (Simkins, Close, & Smith, 2009).

*Phased Retirement:* Phased retirement is a program that provides educators the ability to retire from their current position and return to the same or equivalent position making approximately 50% more gross pay (Smartschoolsplus, 2018).

*Retirement bulge:* A time when a large mass of the given workforce is coming of age to leave the workforce (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Brundrett, Rhodes, & Gkolia, 2006).

*Succession planning:* Succession planning is known as “the process of preparing individuals within an organization to take over leadership positions at some point in the future” (*Succession Planning*, 2015, para. 1).

*Replacement planning:* Replacement planning is the process of planning the present time for filling vacancies in the future (Rothwell, 2015).

*Teacher leadership:* The opportunities given to teachers to contribute to the decision-making process within a school and district (Cosenza, 2015).

*The Leadership Academy:* A program designed by the public school district to cultivate future leaders at a district level.

*Traditional development programs:* Traditional development programs are those programs created and administered by a college or university in which participants usually earn a master's or doctorate degree once completed (Alvoid & Black, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

K–12 leadership succession planning is vital when a school district administration wants to achieve their vision or mission to develop lifelong learners, provide excellent education, and graduate students that positively impact the world (Arizona Department of Education, 2018). Succession planning gives a district an opportunity to align their goals, visions/missions and to empower their employees (Cohn, Khurana, & Reeves, 2005). This research focused on

perceptions of K–12 public-school educators who engaged in a leadership development program at a district level. The goal of the researcher was to assess educators' perceptions of how the program supported professional growth in leadership and what benefit they received from experiences in the program.

In the literature review, there was an examination of the literature surrounding educators' perspectives of leadership development regarding K–12 leadership succession planning. This examination explored how succession planning was developed in different fields compared to education. Additionally, there is a breakdown of how the leadership development programs are connected to succession planning and how this is connected to how teachers perceive professional development. The researcher examined leadership models in relation to what impact the structure of leadership has on the development of a succession plan. Furthermore, the methods section describes the collective case study approach where the researcher used demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and physical artifacts in a three-stage analysis to present an in-depth view of the participants' perceptions of the district leadership development program.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Succession planning, leadership development, and leadership development programs are the main themes explored in the literature review. Within each of these sections, the researcher found connections among all themes that led back to succession planning. In the literature, minimal research was found on educators' perceptions of leadership development at a district level, confirming the importance of the focus of the research study.

#### **Succession Planning**

Succession planning is “the process of preparing individuals within an organization to take over leadership positions at some point in the future” (*Succession Planning*, 2015, para. 1). Rothwell (2015) explains that many company leaders think they are succession planning but really are just replacement planning. The difference between replacement planning and succession planning is that replacement planning is focused on filling vacancies on an individual basis in present time compared to succession planning, which is a more holistic approach to planning for the future through training and replacing a great number of individuals (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Rothwell, 2015).

All levels of leaders in the education field around the world have begun to recognize the need to focus on academic leadership development (Ladyshevsky & Flavell, 2012). The problem can be seen as more alarming in education because it would directly affect student learning. Additionally, an obstacle that is challenging current leadership is that “potential candidates are simply not willing to apply for, or assume, principalships in schools with high staff turnover, limited resources, and low student achievement” (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007, pp. 1–2). These obstacles may cause the position to seem unmanageable, and qualified candidates do not see the



benefit of selecting that career path. Successful leadership candidates need support and guidance to see the whole picture when it comes to educational leadership (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2013).

A large and growing body of literature has investigated succession planning in many fields. There is not always a formal process for identifying and developing capable individuals who can be utilized to fill anticipated future roles, ensuring an ongoing and sustaining talent pool for the continued success of the organization (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009b; Riddick, 2009). Additionally, Rhodes and Brundrett (2009b) note the lack of research on the topic of succession in relation to educational leadership. By collecting data through qualitative methods, they attempt to gain more insight into the matter. The researcher's goal was to probe lead teachers and formal leaders regarding their perceptions of succession planning. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009a) collected data through focus groups and a questionnaire on perceptions of administrators, middle leaders, and classroom teachers about leadership succession planning within their own schools. Findings from their study uncovered that "coupled with a demystification of leadership, fostering teamwork and perhaps promoting a distributed leadership approach may be a way to begin to address disenchantment and in turn aid leadership succession planning within schools" (p. 394). Changing a person's perception about a given topic that they may feel strongly about is difficult, and that is why Owens and Valesky (2011) suggest that a researcher needs to collect ample data to support themes that are found within the research. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009a) agreed with Owens and Valesky (2011) and recommended that further research is needed on perceptions of leadership development.

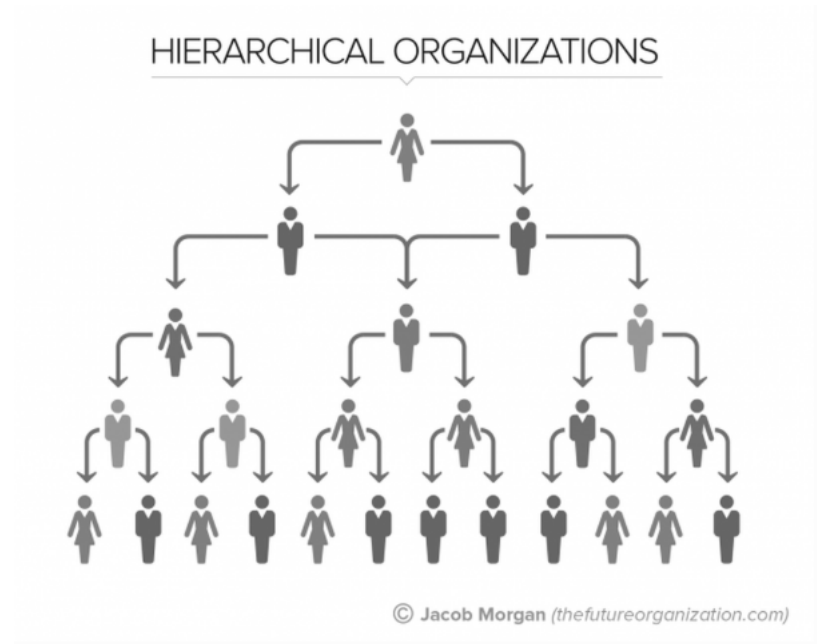
There is a growing concern about succession within education and companies alike due to the large demographic group referred to as "retirement bulge" (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007;

Brundrett, Rhodes & Gkolia, 2006) or “Baby Boomers aging into retirement” or “the graying” of the school leadership profession that further compounds the problem (Fusarelli et al., 2018) of an ageing workforce in mass numbers. Most middle level and senior leadership teams will be in retirement age within the next few years, leaving a potentially vast and gaping hole within the current foundational hierarchy. This impending transition is causing a sense of urgency, resulting in an even greater need to develop leadership programs to cultivate highly qualified future leaders within education to avoid the possible performance lag that often comes with leadership change (Brundrett et al., 2006; Fusarelli et al., 2018).

Recognizing these concerns of the ever looming “retirement bulge,” Brundrett et al. (2006) conducted a study focused on perspectives of recruitment and retention of staff in schools. This study used interviews and questionnaires to collect qualitative data from nine different schools. The findings showed that the majority of schools retained a hierarchical structure, with staff taking on specific responsibilities. This structure can be stifling for teachers to extend their role naturally because they had to follow a structured path without autonomy. Additionally, Brundrett et al. (2006) suggest there are direct links between student performance and quality leadership development. This linkage leads some researchers to suggest a correlation between leadership development and promotions from within an organization with student performance. Overall, schools that had a flatter approach towards leadership positions cultivated a more open environment for teachers to extend themselves into leadership positions (Baenen, 2011; Brundrett et al., 2006; Lovely, 2004).

There are four different types of leadership structure that were discussed in a *Forbes* article by Morgan (2015): traditional hierarchy, flatter organizations, flat organizations, flatarchies, holarctic organizations. In relation to schools and school districts, traditional

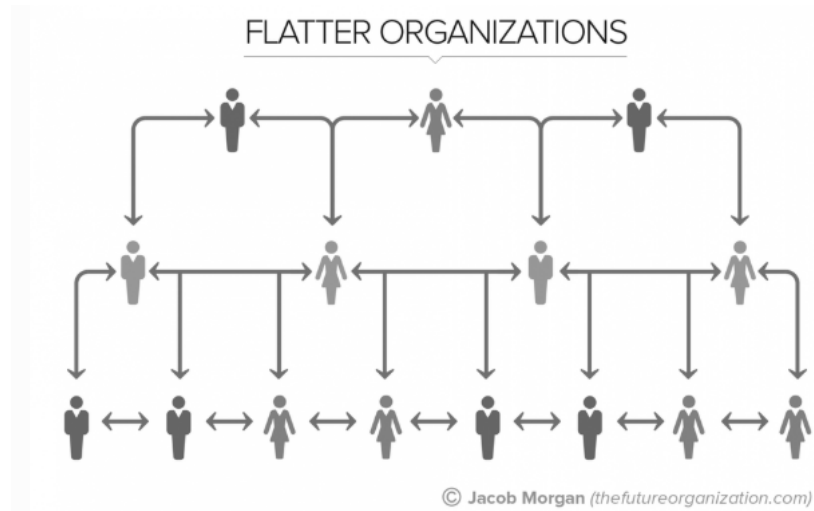
hierarchy and flatter organization models are the most relatable. The traditional hierarchy approach is usually adopted by organizations and schools/school districts alike. The model traditional hierarchy in Figure 1 below works well for jobs with linear function with little to no autonomy. Some challenges to this model are communication, top-down approach, collaboration, and bureaucracy (Morgan, 2015).



*Figure 1.* Traditional hierarchy model of leadership (Morgan, 2015).

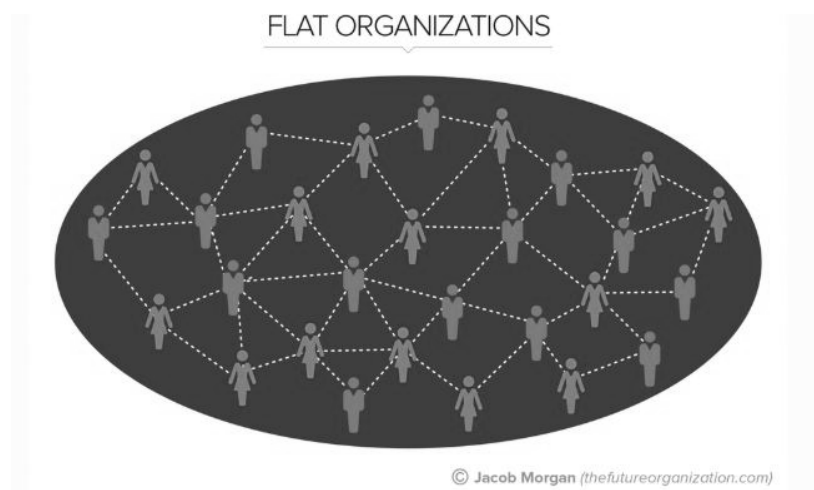
There is a growing body of literature regarding the dysfunction within the hierarchy model (Morgan, 2015). More and more companies are moving away from the hierarchy model and exploring alternatives that could solve these problems. For example, the flatter model gives employees more than one way to communicate and to collaborate by removing layers, seen below in Figure 2. Additionally, the goal of this model was to simplify the most challenging areas of the traditional model of leadership to a more level approach. This approach works well

when higher level leadership understands that the employees do not *need* to work at the company—they should *want* to work at the company (Forbes, 2015).



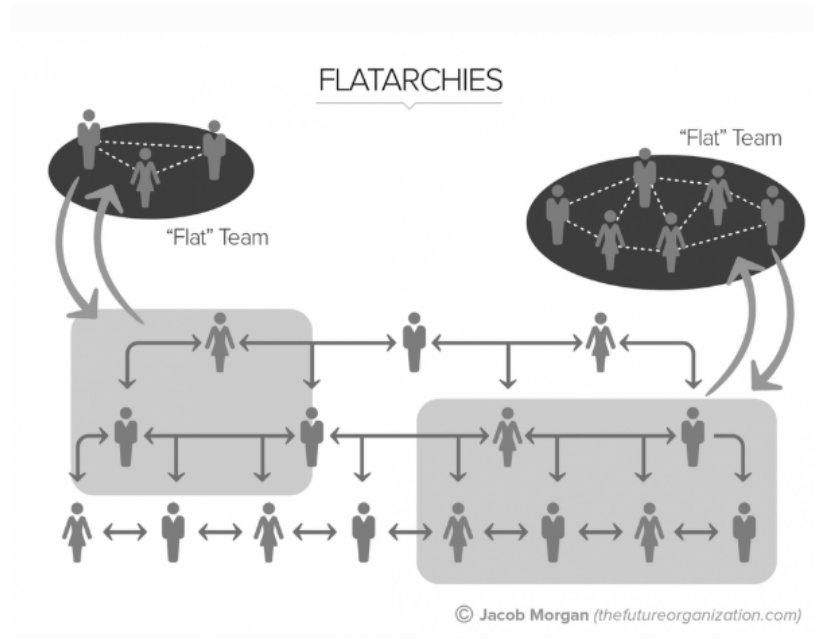
*Figure 2.* Flatter organization model (Morgan, 2015).

The Flat model in Figure 3 below shows the concept that everyone is equal; there are no job titles. This is often referred to as a self-managed organization (Morgan, 2015). This model would be the most challenging to translate into an education system that is currently in place.



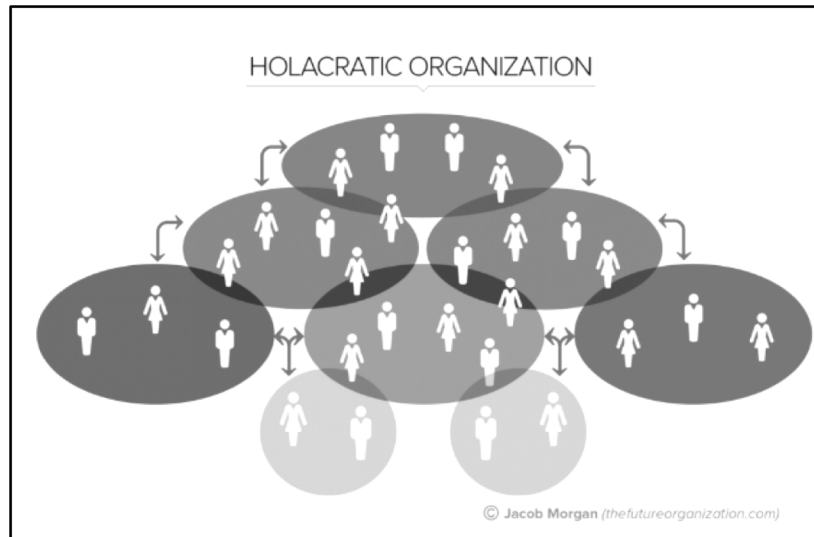
*Figure 3.* Flat organization model (Morgan, 2015).

A mixed method model is the Flatarchies in Figure 4 below. This method takes aspects from hierarchies and flat organizations, using work teams that exist but are not in the structure (Morgan, 2015).



*Figure 4.* Flatarchies model (Morgan, 2015).

The newest model is the Holacratic organization in figure 5 below. This model does not have direct boss-like figures in place at any level. The main purpose of this structure is to cultivate decision-making skills at every level within an organization giving employees the ability to work at any level.



*Figure 5.* Holacratic organization model (Morgan, 2015).

Each of these models has challenges but switching to an alternative structure could allow for more autonomy for schools and school districts to support leadership at every level within the organization (Morgan, 2015).

According to Fusarelli et al. (2018), a critical issue facing larger school districts is the problem of supply and demand. The districts experience problems when the need for leaders outweighs the supply of potential candidates. Planning for the future allows for stability within an organization. Investing in an organization's employees is a strategy that brings about a long-term leadership growth plan and builds their leadership "bench strength." Fusarelli et al. (2018) referenced a study by Riddick (2009) regarding a company's "bench strength" as for how strong one's team is in reference to a sports team. For example, a team is only as strong as their player sitting on the bench because a team must always be prepared to pull from their bench to fill any position caused by unforeseen events, or the team or company might be forced to fill the opening with a less qualified candidate (Riddick, 2009). Even though this is common practice in

successful corporations, internal leadership succession planning is much less common in the U.S. education system. Despite the plethora of research showing that quality leadership is critical to high-performing schools, such leadership development may be hampered by bureaucracy and lack of funding (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Riddick, 2009).

Ibarra (2005) suggested that companies use succession planning to not only develop their employees but to maintain a stronger workforce for today, tomorrow, and the future.

Additionally, a characteristic of a highly effective company is using a direct approach when it comes to change; they face it head on, investing time, money, and effort in every level of employee to guarantee their company's stability (Collins, 2001). A school district can learn from these companies when it comes to facing a changing world by planning for the future with effectively implementing these companies' strategies (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Pynes (2004) understands this concept, but at the same time notes "sometimes the political realities of public organizations undermine change" (p. 399), meaning that the school district does not have as much autonomy as corporations when it comes to allotting funding. As far as Schall (1997) is concerned, there are four different obstacles that are facing the public sector:

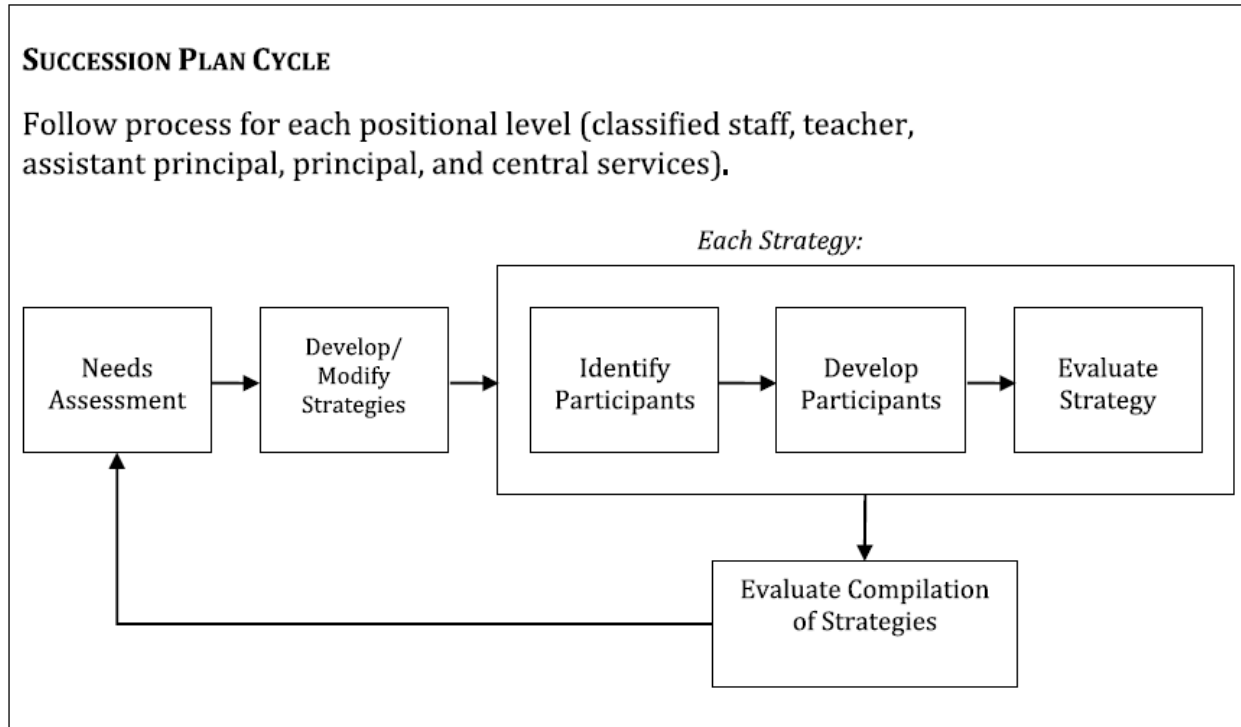
(a) succession planning is a large undertaking, (b) it is not clear whose job it is to plan for succession (c) there is no frame of reference for a succession plan, and (d) there is an ever-changing political environment (Schall, 1997).

Even with these challenges, it is essential that school district leaders understand the components of succession planning that are vital for their survival. Rothwell (2015) suggests that an organization needs to identify the purpose of the program, recognize the measurable objectives, distinguish between competencies needed for success now and for the future for a succession plan to be effective. With respect to succession planning Sobol, Harkins, and Conley

(2007) have examined many companies' succession plans, including those of CIGNA, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, Merrill Lynch, Purina, and Unilever. They found that there were similarities in these companies' plans resulting in Sobol et al. (2007) developing a framework that they call Succession, Progression, and Development (SPD). SPD is a never-ending cycle that includes four distinct phases: (a) design/create/modify the method, (b) examine resources, (c) formulate organization execution, and (d) observe and quantify.

Jarrell and Pewitt, (2007) conducted research into a city government succession plan and found four distinct components for their framework: (a) preparation, (b) selection and development of staff, (c) longevity, and (d) overall assessment. Riddick (2009) used a modified version of this framework in his study on a large school district's succession planning. Figure 6 illustrates the implementation of this framework in a slightly altered manner. This cycle stresses the importance of assessing each strategy to properly evaluate long-term the needs of an effective succession plan.





*Figure 6.* Conceptual framework for succession planning in education (Riddick, 2009).

According to Riddick (2009), succession planning would be more successful if the plan had these three components: recruitment, induction, and development. In this plan, tracking would take place at all levels within the district from teacher assistants to principal positions, allowing a school district succession plan to evolve over time and to include every individual within the organization, sharing the responsibility of development at every level. This succession plan is adapted from Jarrell and Pewitt (2007) who found similar categories.

Although there is not extensive research in succession planning in education, there is enough research about the concept to support the recommendation that it is a necessary undertaking for a school district to be successful (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Succession planning is not a one-and-done mentality—it is a process that is never-ending. There is no silver bullet or one-size-fits-all when it comes to planning for a school district's future; every organization needs

to develop a plan that is right for them and realize that it might not work the first, second, or even third time (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1993). Once an organization adopts a growth mindset to cultivate employees' skills, their accomplishments could be limitless (Capozzi, 2018). This means that in the school district this mindset needs to be developed at every level within the organization, including board members.

Conger and Fulmer (2003) found that a succession plan needs to be as transparent as possible to all stakeholders if district leaders want it to be effective. Their findings supported that “people will contribute more if they know what rung (of the corporate ladder) they are on” (p. 81), meaning that all employees need to comprehend the system and understand how to move forward to reach their career goals. If there is a hindrance for movement within the organization for the employee, then that employee needs to be placed on a track that could benefit them, such as coaching or mentoring, to support success not only for that employee but for the organization as well. A clearly defined succession plan can offer guidance to this individual at every level of the organization (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). The overall goal of this method is to build a stronger, wiser organization where everyone is performing at their greatest potential.

Currently, in Arizona each district is trying its own method to deal with a shortage of well-qualified candidates. With a lack of a clear succession plan school districts are turning to companies like smartSchools that offer a temporary solution called a smartRetireeplus program that promotes phased retirement as a solution or a temporary solution to retirement bulge. Phased retirement is a program that provides educators the ability to retire from their current position and return to the same position making approximately 50% more gross pay (Smartschoolsplus, 2018).

Utilizing companies like smartSchools saves money for the school district because they do not pay into the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) at the same rate as a traditional employee (Smartschoolsplus, 2018). This is made possible by “Arizona law [that] allows a member to terminate employment, retire from the ASRS and return immediately as a Phased Retiree without suspension or penalty of pension” (Arizona State Retirement System, 2016, para. 15). If a school district is in short supply of principals because of the retirement bulge, they could essentially rehire the same employee for less (Arizona State Retirement System, 2016).

### **Leadership development**

Karaevli and Hall (2002) stressed that there is no *best* path when it comes to succession planning. Based on their research findings all plans were successful but in a different way; it came down to context and implementation. They also reiterate that succession planning is a process, not a single event. The development process of a leader is more effective when a succession plan is aligned to the organization's goal, reinforces the organization's vision, empowers employees, and explores strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Cohn, Khurana, & Reeves, 2005). Lovely (2004), believes a way to strengthen the education profession would be to “encourage those with [a] promise to become school leaders. Securing effective candidates to take over when we’re gone will guarantee a successful future for students, schools, the nation, and the world” (p. 18). Goodlad (2004) goes one step further and stresses that school district leaders need to make an intentional effort to “identify employees with leadership potential” (p. 306), giving way to the notion that leadership development and succession planning are intertwined (Fusarelli et al., 2018).

Fusarelli et al. (2018) explored a report from Learning First showing analysis of principal training across Ontario, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. The findings supported that the leadership development process needed to be:

(a) well-designed, (b) intentional approach to leadership development, (c) including training and development aligned with the vision of the system, (d) identifying and grooming teachers for leadership roles, (e) creating training programs that emphasize problem-solving skills, and (f) ensuring ongoing professional development continues throughout a principal's career. (Sparks, 2017 as cited in Fusarelli et al., 2018, p. 287)

Furthermore, these groups understood that leadership development is equivalent to effective teaching methods and are both factors that impact student achievement (Educational Research Service, 1998; Elmore, Pont, Nusche, & Hopkins, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

The creation of highly capable sustainable education leadership is vital to the continual development of schools beyond the leader's tenure at any given school. To seek sustainable education leadership, the school principal, faculty, school board, and all other stakeholders must be committed to the implementation of a school culture that develops strength and evolves over time, according to Cook (2014) who references Owens and Valesky (2011).

School environments are directly impacted by the leadership within the school, with this environment having a direct impact on the results that the school staff produces. The notion that teachers do not leave schools, they leave direct leadership is very valid (Cook, 2014). If a school or district wants better results from the students, it must examine the leadership within the school. Cook's (2014) study goes further to examine the teachers' perspective through multiple questionnaires of schoolteachers to determine their feelings about leadership. The researcher's

questions focused on the sustainability of school leadership, how teachers perceived leadership, and how teachers supported the development of sustainable school leadership (Cook, 2014). The research concluded that school leadership is very important to the teachers and that teachers wanted to be a part of the decisions that were being made in the school (Cook, 2014).

The article by Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) describes “districts [that] are not facing a labor shortage, so much as a skills shortage—characterized by the inability to fill school leadership positions with people who possess the skills necessary to be successful” (p. 697). This suggests that succession planning could benefit from more leadership development to increase the attractiveness of potential candidates (Cook, 2014; Myung et al., 2011).

Leaders sometimes unintentionally fall victim to the *like-me* problem causing them to only see future leaders like themselves (Rothwell, 2015). This mindset could hinder the organization's goal of succession planning because the leader of today doesn't always look like the leader of the future. Organizations are living organisms that grow and change and their leaders need to be able to see the big picture to support longevity within the organization (Rothwell, 2015). The Myung et al. (2011) study also examined the way future leaders were being selected and found two main paths that that current leaders have gone through to gain their leadership position. “Tapping” or sponsored mobility is when a principal selects a candidate based on individual feeling compared to “contest mobility” where all the candidates have an equal chance to attain a position through fair and open procedures based on their merits (Myung et al., 2011). Additionally, Rhodes and Brundrett (2009a) found that there is a need to examine future leaders on their merit. A “better match between leadership, learning, and individual potential at all career stages [this notion] may help to ensure that younger staff also become included in talent pool growth and succession planning” (p. 394). Additionally, Myung et al.

(2011) found that the majority of leaders who went through the “tapping” process resembled the supervisor that sponsored them. This causes a disproportionate effect regarding the demographics of gender and race that were being selected into leadership positions. Comparably, “contest mobility” candidates supported a more balanced leadership group in relation to gender and race (Myung et al., 2011).

Elmore et al. (2008) focused on how school leaders can make a difference in school and student performance by granting autonomy to the teachers to make important decisions on their own. Additionally, the study found that distributing leadership responsibilities to a wide variety of school leadership roles creates a more effective leadership team and more enjoyment from the staff overall. Furthermore, the authors examined the possibility of altering what it means to be a principal or in leadership within a school to spread the responsibilities among more people. This would help support the overall success of all parties involved, creating more of a team environment; not all the responsibilities of developing and leading the school would be solely in the hands of the administrators (Cook, 2014; Elmore et al., 2008).

Collins (2001) stresses the importance of putting the right people in the right position to help support growth within a given organization. Additionally, he suggests that great leaders develop all the people around them to create a lasting presence of change and growth within the group. Having the right leadership team in place that supports the development of all employees is one of the main ways a team can make the leap from good to great.

### **Leadership Development Programs**

Regarding leadership development programs, Normore (2007) believes that “successful school districts provide well-structured leadership development opportunities and experiences by capitalizing in [the] long-term investment of time, energy, attention, and resources to

professional development programs” (p. 8). Successful education systems create an environment that is structured to identify potential leaders at every stage of their career, giving the development program scalability (Sparks, 2017). The creation of a “leadership pipeline” (Fuller, Reynolds, & O’Doherty, 2017; Korach & Cosner, 2017) should be intentional, using strategies to recruit individuals with potential in the area of the shortage or foreseen shortage. Fusarelli et al. (2018) created a model that is being utilized in multiple school districts with the hope of developing a “leadership pipeline” in which the focus is on developing teacher leaders to evolve into the school leadership with the potential to be tapped for advanced leadership development. The goal behind this implementation is to support long-term plans that will meet the growing needs of the school and school district by creating an ample supply of potential leaders.

The Wallace Foundation (2007) identified key elements of effective leadership development programs that utilized mentoring programs. The five main aspects in the findings are: (a) established selection process; (b) official development for mentors; (c) mentors should be similar to candidate (d) compensation to mentor; and (e) the mentor program develops all parties involved. Some organizations are taking steps to start a development program by identifying “lynchpin positions” with the belief that these jobs are vital to the future of the organization (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). Conger and Fulmer (2003) state, “by monitoring the pipeline for these jobs, companies can focus development programs on ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate talent” (p. 79). This approach could be more cost effective and less time consuming than collecting data on all personnel but could leave the organization open to missing potential talent.

Inadequate transitional support for teachers evolving into leadership positions is a problem that is plaguing succession planning for K–12 leadership. Ideally, teachers should be exposed to leadership skills within their schools or districts prior to earning advanced degrees to

support drive/interest from teachers early in their career. This exposure could benefit teachers, students, schools, and districts alike (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009a). Cosenza (2015) agrees with Rhodes and Brundrett (2009a) and goes one step further with the statement “Teachers need to be given opportunities to leave the isolation of their classrooms to collaborate with others in order to build leadership capacity” (p. 79). Teacher leadership is a broader concept than just being in a formal role with a distinct title. Giving teachers the opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process within a school will result in more committed teachers and a more well-rounded school. Additionally, creating opportunities for teachers to experience leadership roles while not giving up the comfort zone of the classroom could be a good transition starting point within leadership development (Cosenza, 2015). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) confirm this with the statement, “One of the best ways to secure successful succession is to stretch and spread leadership across people now, not just in the future, to distribute and develop leadership so that successors will emerge more readily and take over more easily” (p. 93). An example of this is informal teacher leadership when teachers are given the opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process within a school, which will result in more committed teachers and a more rounded school. To examine the experience of teachers taking on informal roles of leadership this researcher will collect data on a school level to explore all the avenues teachers are given to transition into leadership positions.

Earley, Weindling, Bubb, & Glenn (2009) conducted a study that focuses on the “negative perceptions of the work and the role of school leaders—especially regarding accountabilities and workload” (p. 295). The study argues that this is why schools and districts are facing challenges in the recruitment of leadership. Additionally, the study proposed “early identification of talent, and mentoring and coaching these individuals, and providing them with



many opportunities to lead” (p. 295). These are key areas that schools and districts need to focus on to support the resolution of this growing crisis (Earley et al., 2009).

Johnson and Donaldson (2007) suggest that educators need different pathways to follow within the education field if a district wants to have long-lasting success; for example, using roles such as “instructional coach, lead teacher, mentor coordinator, and data analyst” (p. 8). These roles could be alternative positions that could allow a teacher to access a leadership position. Johnson and Donaldson (2007) also found through their study that, due to the lack of veteran teachers, principals have started to ask teachers at a very early stage in their career to take on roles outside the classroom that they are not ready to take on. The study found that these novice teachers have high hopes and are usually enthusiastic teachers, but are hit with challenges that they were unprepared for, causing undue stress that more often leads these once promising future leaders to leave the education field. Conger and Fulmer (2003) found that there is a balance between cultivating new leaders supporting growth at the appropriate level. “You must make sure that high potential employees have enough options that they don’t grow restless—royal heirs can be expected to show patience when waiting for the throne, but corporate heirs have many other opportunities” (p. 82). Cook (2014) and Myung et al. (2011) both agree with Conger and Fulmer (2003) about providing employees opportunities to move within an organization in a timely manner to not lose highly developed candidates.

Earley et al. (2009) examined New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), a U.S. nonprofit organization founded on five core beliefs:

- Every child can reach high levels of academic excellence, regardless of background;

- Adults are accountable for building and maintaining systems to ensure that all children excel academically. Adults can and must do more to unlock the potential of each and every student;
- Delivering high-quality public education to all children is a cornerstone of our democracy, economy, and society, and it is critical to sustaining a just society that affords every child the full range of opportunities in life;
- Great principals lead great schools, coaching, and inspiring teachers to reach and teach every child and collaborating with students' parents, families, and communities to make schools work; and
- With access to outstanding public schools, all children will develop the competence, critical thinking, and social and civic skills to reach their highest potential in the classroom and in life. (Earley et al., 2009, p. 269)

Additionally, this program selects and trains individuals from within education, as well as former educators, to become urban school principals. It calls itself "a movement to transform urban schools nationally and locally" and has financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Broad Foundation (Earley et al., 2009, p. 269). The study found that this development program was very successful a form of the program was implemented in London (Earley et al., 2009).

Browne-Ferrigno's (2007) study used the following framework as an outline to support what a leadership development program should consist of: "instructional and assessment strategies, based on the four theories of action, including comprehensive action research, group-development activities, individual and group reflection, inquiry learning, and participant presentations to authentic audiences" (p. 4). The study focused on high-need rural areas, but

seems relevant to all school districts in different forms. A three-year grant paid for the implementation of the suggested leadership development program of two cohorts. The cohorts were composed of teachers and principals. The program participants had weekly activities, school-based action research, summer institutes, mentors, and instructors. The program focused on preparing the participants for the challenges of working in an environment with low funding, high turnover, and little resources. Additionally, it provided coaching on communication skills, teacher development, and working with community training (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007).

Ladyshevsky and Flavell (2012) conducted a study that used a qualitative research method to collect data from teachers that have gone through the leadership development program to determine if the program was working to develop leadership skills that would instill confidence in leaders in their new positions. The leadership development program consists of a 10-module academic leadership program designed for PCs and face-to-face meetings for 2 hours. The leadership development program goal was to focus on “. . . building influence, communicating more effectively, and managing upwards. Improved confidence in their ability to perform the role was a lasting outcome and the use of peer learning and coaching was an important part of the success of the intervention” (p. 127). At the end of the program, the researcher utilized questionnaires to collect data from the teachers who participated in the leadership development program. The author concluded that the program was able to meet some of the objectives in building influence and communicating more effectively.

Another approach to leadership development that was studied by Simkins et al. (2009) suggests that the best way to train future leaders was to give them “work-shadowing” or the closest hands-on experience as possible. Simkins et al. (2009) provided categories of shadowing:

pure shadowing, shadowing plus in-depth discussion, understanding the school, and investigating a personal issue. Simkins et al. (2009) defined the following:

1. "Pure shadowing," where observing the head at work was the primary activity and discussions with the head were framed by the issues that arose from the activities observed. As one head put it to his participant, he was "not going to change anything for my benefit" and she would see everything, although the rule of confidentiality excluded her from some situations with staff and parents.
2. "Shadowing plus in-depth discussion." Here shadowing took place, but, in addition, lengthy discussions occurred about broader and deeper issues of headship that did not necessarily derive from the particular activities observed on the shadowing days.
3. "Understanding the school." Here the process was orchestrated so the participant got a broader picture of the school, of challenges faced by leadership and of various perspectives on the school that could not be obtained by spending most of their time with the head. Although there would typically be some shadowing, this approach also involved discussions with a range of staff and observations of activities without the head present.
4. "Investigating a personal issue." Here the placements were organized to enable the participant to develop their understanding of specific issues they particularly wished to explore. Those issues influenced which aspects of the head's work were focused on and provided the basis for other activities, such as examining documents, observation and speaking to staff. (p. 245)

All of these actionable applications supported different experiences within that position (Simkins et al., 2009). This approach allowed for data to be collected on potential leaders within an organization, possibly leading to a strong succession plan.

## **Conclusion**

Through this process of examining prior research on K–12 succession planning, themes appeared: there is a need for succession planning, leadership development is vital to the longevity of successful organizations, and there are many different points of view of what leadership development should look like. Additionally, key terms were defined within the review: “retirement bulge” (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Brundrett et al., 2006), “succession plan” (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009b), “tapping” (Myung et al., 2011), “contest mobility” (Myung et al., 2011), “teachers’ perceptions” (Early et al., 2009) “under-qualified applicants” (Cook, 2014), “lynchpin positions” (Conger & Fulmer, 2003), “leadership pipeline” (Fuller et al., 2017; Korach & Cosner, 2017), and “teacher leadership” (Cook, 2014). These are all topics that were brought up in the literature review that could benefit from further research into education leadership development. Allowing for a deeper discussion into these topics could give a more holistic view. This study focused on teachers’ and education support personnel’s perceptions of leadership development at a district level. Additionally, the majority of the research reviewed used qualitative methods with a combination of focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires, supporting this study that used a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and physical artifacts.

Many forms of leadership programs have been created to solve the succession planning obstacle. Within this study, the researcher focused on a district leadership program called the Leadership Academy that was created to focus on aspiring leaders that have at least three years of teaching experience and who have the desire to become a leader within the next two years. This study examined past participants of this leadership development program, focusing on their experience and perspective of how the program impacted their leadership development.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Succession planning for K–12 leadership is the process of preparing educators to become leaders within the organization (Succession Planning, 2015). To help school leaders and teachers prepare for future leadership demands, one school district in Arizona created and implemented a district-level program with the goal to develop teachers into positional leaders within the organization. By exploring past participants' perceptions of their experience through a district-level leadership program the goal of this study was to examine how participants perceive their growth as leaders as a result of their learning. The purpose of this study was to explore the perspective of educators who engaged in the leadership development program and how participants describe their leadership development experience. Furthermore, the researcher explored the perceived benefits of the program on their professional growth and development. Based on the literature, succession planning, leadership development, and employee perception are connected. The holistic approach of planning for the future through developing employees from within the organization supports the “growth mindset” and the 21st century skills of internal motivation needed to create a successful succession plan (Capozzi, 2018; Fusarelli et al., 2018; Ibarra, 2005; Pink, 2011; Rothwell, 2015).

This researcher used a collective case study methodology to investigate a common experience across multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2011) of a district level leadership development program. A collective case study obtains data from participants who have experienced a similar phenomenon across a period of time. A collective study was selected as the design for this study because the focus is on a group of individuals who participated in a district-level leadership development program within the past five years. As there are numerous

participants who took part in the leadership program, a collective case study allows for individual experiences to be examined, as well as a cross-analysis of participants' experience (Creswell, 2013). To gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' perspectives of leadership, the researcher collected data in three ways: through the use of a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of physical artifacts that participants were asked to present in the semi-structured interviews.

To minimize the error in the case study, the research followed a protocol recommended by Yin (2003): (a) an overview of the case study project; (b) a description of the interview/data collection procedures; (c) the processes used to secure audio recordings, typed transcripts and written notes; (d) the case study interview guide; and (e) the methods used to evaluate and analyze the data. Along with the protocol the researcher used a collective case study approach to give the researcher the ability to focus on many variables asking the “why” questions to gain a deeper understanding of the past participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2011) notes, “It is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals or a few cases. This is because the overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site” (p. 217). It was the intention of this researcher to recruit at least eight participants who have engaged in the district program within the past five years to provide validity to the qualitative collective case study. Furthermore, the participants were from a span of time within the program implementation, giving the sample group a broad knowledge base from which to collect and connect the research back to the collective case study method.

### **Setting**

The study examined a leadership development program in a large school district in Arizona. The public school district encompasses many different cities in and around Maricopa County. As of 2013, there were more than a million students within 2,267 public schools in 666 school districts in the state of Arizona (Arizona Department of Education, 2018). The Edwards Renee Unified School District was selected because of the unique development program called the Leadership Academy that focuses on teachers becoming leaders.

### **Research questions**

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How do public, K–12 educators describe their leadership development as a result of a district-level leadership development program?

RO<sub>2</sub>: What aspects of leadership development do K–12 educators perceive as most beneficial to their professional growth and development?

### **Participants/Sample**

The goal was to use what Creswell (2011) suggested “. . . is *purposeful* sampling. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 214). However, this study had to use a mixture of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to gain access to the participants of the past five years because the district records were on participants for only the past three years. In snowball sampling, the researcher asks participants to identify others who have participated (Creswell, 2015) in the Leadership Academy within the past five years. Also, all potential participants were employed within the same school district in which the program was administered.



## **Data**

Data collection methods for this qualitative, collective case study include an online demographic questionnaire administered through Google Forms, semi-structured interviews, and physical artifacts. These instruments were selected for their ability to enable the researcher to collect as much data as possible to create a robust analysis process. The alignment of the type of study instruments and analysis is critical to answering the research questions, without which there would not be a comprehensive study (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were approximately 30 minutes in duration. Further, all interviews were held at a mutually agreed upon, neutral location to ensure that the participants felt secure in giving an unbiased opinion (Creswell, 2013), either over the phone or in a classroom. Participants of this study were asked to bring a physical artifact to the interview that represents what the development program meant to them. Six out of the eight participants completed this section of the data collection process. The two participants who did not complete the request did not understand the request or forgot. The interviews were recorded using two different digital recording devices: a Sony ICDUX560BLK and a Samsung Galaxy Note8 to provide a backup and to ensure the accuracy of audio documentation. Transcription of semi-structured interviews were transcribed through the online program Rev. Each component of the data collection is a piece of the “puzzle” (Baxter & Jack, 2001) to gain a more holistic view of the participant's perspectives.

Interview questions were used to guide the data collection. Merriam (1998) specifies that “data collection is guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings” (p. 120). The use of open-ended questions were used so that an in-depth understanding of the participant's viewpoint is fully captured in the data collection process (Forbes, 2014).

## **Demographic Questionnaires**

The demographic questionnaire is a tool to collect basic information about potential participants, i.e., age range, gender, ethnicity, and education level. The demographic questionnaire consisted of skip logic questions to ultimately recruit participants. The demographic questionnaires were sent out through email inviting the potential participants to take a short, online demographic questionnaire to determine their history with the school district and the Leadership Academy. In the questionnaire, potential participants were asked to participate in the semi-structured interview process, and the participants who were interested provided their name and email address so that the researcher could contact them. The demographic questionnaire was hosted through the online platform Google Forms through an intermediary to keep all participants' identities confidential. All results were sent to the researcher directly via email. The Demographic Questionnaire Protocol can be found in Appendix A.

## **Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews give the researcher the ability to gain a deeper and broader understanding of a participant's experience by allowing the participants to somewhat lead the conversation, while avoiding closed-ended or leading questions, academic language, combined topics, and the frame (Bernard, 2000; Zorn, 2010). A semi-structured interview method approach was used to obtain focused and textual data. This method offers a balanced approach when it comes to the style of questions, with open-ended and structured questions allowing the researcher to judge when to ask probing questions or to move on. That is why this method was used in the interview. The Semi-structured Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix B. One

question was altered based on the pilot study because the questions could possibly breach the participant's privacy by asking about the current position held.

### **Artifacts**

Participants were asked to bring a physical artifact to the interview that represents what leadership development means to them. Artifacts were collected digitally or sent through email as a photograph or link and no personal identification was allowed within a photograph. Furthermore, the participants were asked to describe or explain what the artifact was and the meaning regarding leadership development the artifact held for the participant (Creswell, 2015). The held meaning of the artifact was normally connected to a personal story that gave the researcher a unique insight into the type of leader the participant became or hopes to become.

### **Analysis**

This study utilized in vivo coding as the initial analysis of the data collected and the constant comparative method as the second type of analysis on the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. These methods were compatible because each method supported the researcher in viewing the same data with different lenses, giving a holistic view of what the participants meant (Saldaña, 2016). In the first stage of the process of analysis, the researcher used the method of in vivo coding to capture a word or phrase directly from the participant. This coding method was appropriate in a qualitative collective case study because it ensures that the participant's voice is captured to gain data on their perception of the experience. Applying in vivo coding on a transcript gave the researcher the ability to go multiple sentences without a code because the goal was to capture a participant's voice. Sometimes in coding, a whole thought from a participant was more valuable in understanding the participants' meaning. This was very useful when the researcher conducted an analysis of the physical artifacts that the participants

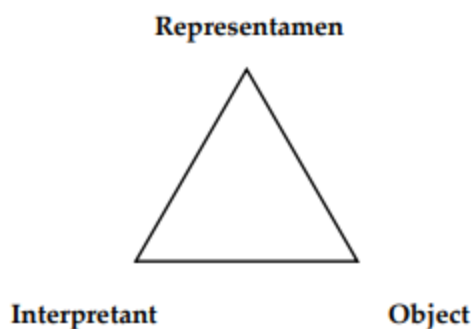
presented as to what held meaning for them regarding leadership development. Furthermore, the researcher used a key to show emphasis on a phrase or words spoken, i.e., bolding, underlining, italicizing, highlighting, or tone in an intense manner gave another layer of dimensions to the categories coded on the transcripts (Saldaña, 2016).

For the next stage of the process of analysis, the researcher used a constant comparative method. The constant comparative is a method of analysis that allowed the researcher to read and re-read the transcripts independently and holistically to identify differences, similarities, and patterns in the data (Armstrong, 2015; Creswell, 2011; Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 2002; Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, this cycle of analysis allowed the researcher to create a grouping of the categories to identify themes or concepts found in the first stage. The researcher created figures that built on one another to show connections of different themes per participants to show similarities and differences between participants and their perceptions.

The constant-comparative method laid the groundwork for the third stage, which was a cross-case analysis. This was a systematic comparison between participants of the collective case study to gain a holistic understanding of the experience. Collective case study supports this analysis by collecting multiple cases of a similar event to describe and compare the insight into an experience of an individual or group (Creswell, 2011). Additionally, the nature of a case study design allows researchers to identify themes, patterns, and behaviors expressed by the study's participants (Creswell, 2015). Collecting multiple experiences of a similar event allows the researcher to cross all cases and gain a deeper comparison that obtains more insightful descriptions and explanations (Creswell, 2015).

Finally, the researcher performed a nonindexical analysis of the physical artifacts. Nonindexical data, also known as nonvariable data (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000), added another layer

of comprehension and comparison of the participant's perception through a cross-case analysis. The researcher used a semiotic approach when analyzing digital photographs and weblinks of the artifacts based on Peirce's triadic model that is shown in Figure 7.



*Figure 7.* Peirce's triadic model (as cited in Chandler, 2017)

This model was used to gain a deeper understanding of what the artifact means using *representamen* for what the item means to the participant, *object* meaning what material thing the artifact was that can be seen or touched, and *interpretant* as what the researcher understands of the participant's meaning behind the artifact (Chandler, 2017). Furthermore, the collective case study structure was used to guide the researcher to bring the aspects together under a central focal point.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted with volunteers who had a deep understanding of the leadership development program at the district level. The pilot study sought to validate not only the interview questions, but the semi-structured interview protocol. The pilot study was not recorded and the data was not collected to be part of the actual case study, but it was useful in determining the layout of questions (Merriam, 2009). For example, one of the questions in the

protocol was deleted because it led to the possibility of identifying the participant. The researcher found that the order of the questions needed to be altered to keep the participant focused on the research questions. Furthermore, the questions involving the participant's responses to the demographic questionnaire needed to be slightly altered based on the participant's response.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was used to allow participants and researcher the ability to verify data. Participants received an email from the researcher once their semi-structured interview was transcribed. The participants were asked to review, edit, add, or even ask more questions to add to or clarify the transcript. The researcher received one request out of the eight participants to alter their transcription. The alteration was in regard to the name of the book used in the book study and regarding the participant's prior education. This process was used to verify accuracy, credibility, and reliability (Saldaña, 2016).

### **Participant Rights**

This study followed guidelines established by the University of New England to protect all human participants from harm. Participants were given two weeks to decide to join the study without any pressure from the researcher. To ensure this process was upheld, this researcher verbally explained the purpose of the study and the consent form and that participants could refuse to answer any question or leave the study at any time without fear of recourse. Additionally, participants were provided a copy of the informed consent form that is located in Appendix C. Furthermore, to protect the participants' rights and to keep data confidential each participant was given a pseudonym.

### **Limitations**

According to Creswell (2009), a study that collects data on a person's perception is "filtered" through their own lens (p.179). This study was therefore limited by participants' views or beliefs. Additionally, in a collective case study method, the small sample size and the use of selective sampling are both limitations. Furthermore, the researcher was also an employee of the district that was researched and was a past participant of the district leadership development program. To minimize the bias, the researcher used the bracketing method to take themselves out of the equation in regard to their experiences or feelings about the topic (Creswell, 2013).

### **Credibility**

The definition of credibility is a sense of trustworthiness in the findings (Creswell, 2015). Creswell (2009) suggests that a researcher utilize multiple strategies to improve confirmability. As part of this process participants of semi-structured interviews received a copy of the transcript giving participants the ability to edit, amend, or clarify any responses and/or themes to verify the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2011). To support the credibility of the study the researcher utilized member checking prior to the first and second stage of analysis to support the validity of the analysis.

### **Reliability**

Reliability of a study is defined as the utilization of instruments that have proven value and are designed to control all aspects that could cause bias in the study. These instruments are the foundation of consistency of how the study was conducted (Creswell, 2015). The instruments and protocols that were utilized in this case study were validated through a pilot study. Overall, the goal of this researcher was to conduct a study that could be replicated by utilizing detailed protocols (Creswell, 2015). The pilot study was supportive of this goal by giving the researcher

the ability to ask the same question multiple ways to support the clarity of the question and the flow of the interview.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the perspective of educators who engaged in a district leadership development program and how these participants describe their leadership development experience. Furthermore, the researcher explored the perceived benefits the program had on the participants' professional growth and development.

The participants of the study were educators who had participated in a district leadership development program within the past five years. The study focused on one public school district in Arizona where all participants are currently employed. All participants were given a demographic questionnaire through both purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to gain access to as many participants as possible within the timeframe. Once the demographic questionnaire was completed the researcher was notified if the participant was interested in engaging in an interview. At this time the researcher contacted the participant by either email or phone to set up an interview, and the researcher explained that the physical artifact could be anything, as long as the participant could explain the value or meaning it held to them regarding leadership development.

The researcher used in vivo coding, constant comparative method, cross-case analysis, and nonindexical analysis on the physical artifact, by which the researcher gained a holistic view of the participant's experience. Using the lens of symbolic interactionism theory as the conceptual framework, the researcher sought to understand how people interacted with the leadership development program. This theory focuses on a small-scale perspective of interactions between individuals to objects, events, ideas and other people. The following were the research questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How do public, K–12 educators describe their leadership development as a result of a district-level leadership development program?

RO<sub>2</sub>: What aspects of leadership development do K–12 educators perceive as most beneficial to their professional growth and development?

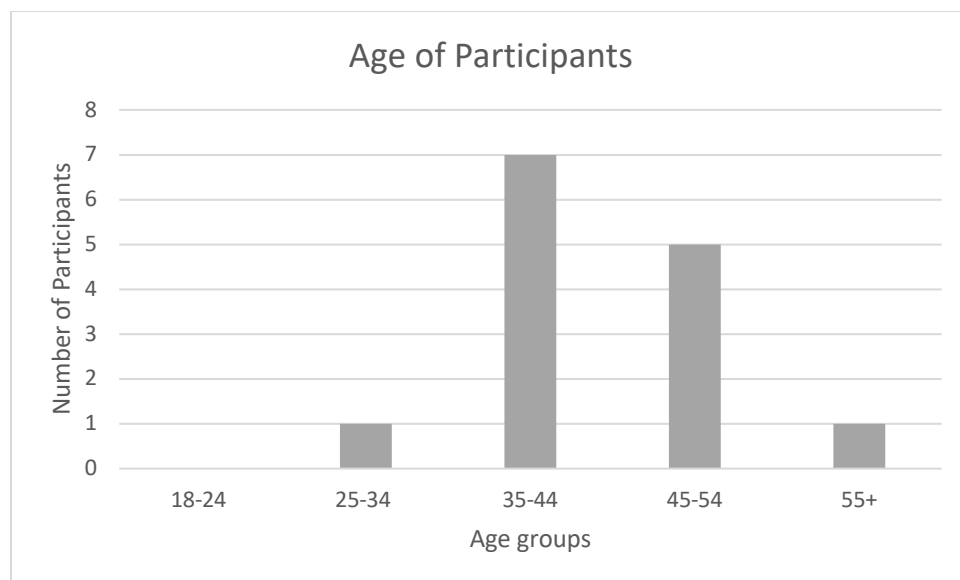
Through analysis of the data, the following themes and subthemes were identified.

<b>Themes and Subthemes</b>	
<b>Theme 1:</b> Leadership training enables growth and development	
<i>Subtheme 1:</i> Professional growth depends on prior position and knowledge. <i>Subtheme 2:</i> Networking allowed for opportunity and development of collaboration. <i>Subtheme 3:</i> Application of applied skills generated personal development.	
<b>Theme 2:</b> Leadership training is more valuable to participants if the training is perceived to be purposeful or beneficial to them personally.	
<b>Theme 3:</b> Differentiation of learning and skill set would be more beneficial to participants.	
<b>Theme 4:</b> Perception of leadership development program regarding personal goal.	

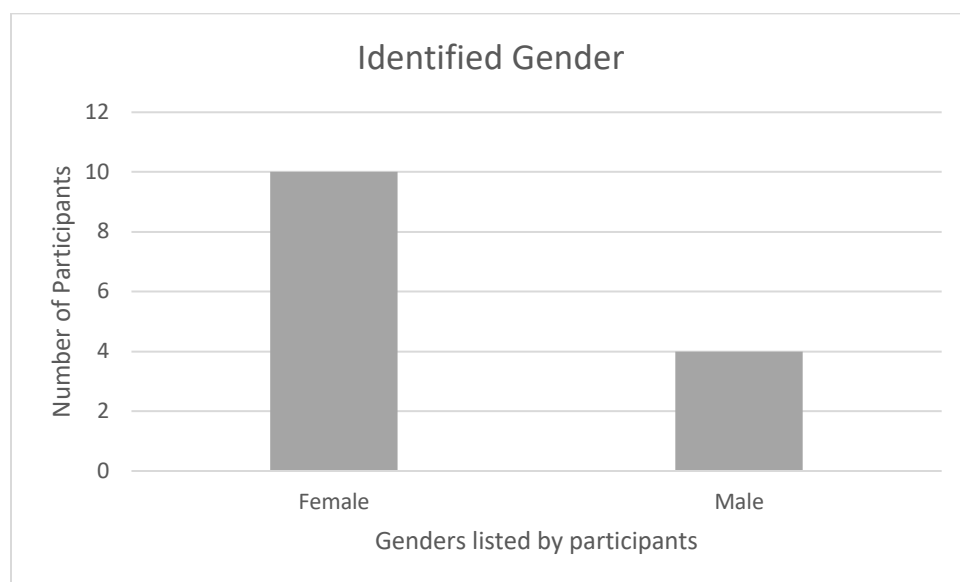
Figure 8. Themes and subthemes

### Demographic Questionnaire Results

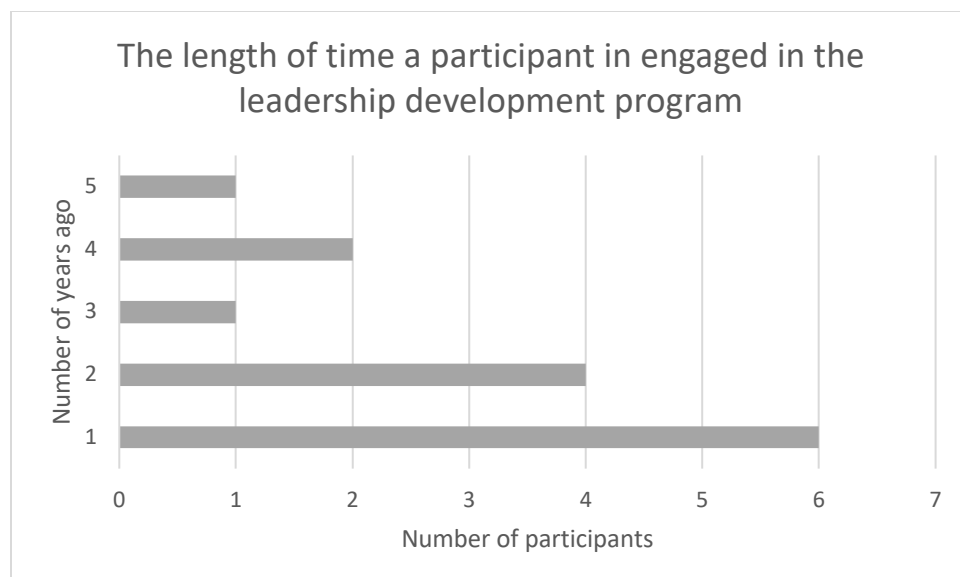
The first data results presented in this section are from the demographic questionnaire where figures are shown to present the age group, gender, and how long ago the participants took part in the leadership development program.



*Figure 9.* The age of the participants in the study



*Figure 10.* Identified gender



*Figure 11.* Represents how long ago a participant was in the leadership development program

Participants in this study worked in a wide range of positions from teachers to education support personnel. However, the positions of the participants were not presented to keep their identity confidential. Ten participants agreed to engage in a semi-structured interview either over the phone or in person, but two participants were unable to fulfill their agreement due to unforeseen scheduling complications. Five of the interview participants were female and three were male. Figure 12 presents the pseudonym of each participant, their age group, current position and length of time since they engaged in the program.

Pseudonym	Age group	Current Position	Length of time since the program
Mr. Flenderson	55+	Education Support Personnel	2
Ms. Martin	35-44	Education Support Personnel	3
Mr. Scott	35-44	Teacher	1
Mr. Halpert	35-44	Education Support Personnel	5
Mr. Schrute	35-44	Education Support Personnel	2
Ms. Beesly	45-54	Teacher	2
Ms. Vance	45-54	Education Support Personnel	4
Ms. Palmer	45-54	Teacher	1

*Table 1.* Pseudonyms, age group, current position, and length of time since the program

### **Theme 1: Leadership Training Enables Growth and Development**

Seven out of eight participants interviewed found some type of growth and/or development from engaging in the leadership development program. But one sentiment suggested many times across interviews is that “leader of the program is extremely important.”

Mr. Halpert was more specific:

That I've seen the district evolve under new leadership, I realize how different people's perspectives and takes on leadership are. So, for example, I went through another interview practice and resume workshop recently. And the things that I was told by the current leader in the same type of position are contrary to what I learned four, five years ago in the program. So that's made me realize how individualized a program like that is. I really think that it's sort of indoctrination process and you learn to think and lead like the person who's teaching you.

As a district evolves over time the leadership development program should as well. Though the basic components of the program have basically stayed the same for the past five years the facilitator of the leadership development program has changed. The participants found that the leadership of the program was “pivotal” to learning the district expectations and ultimately their success within the district.

#### **Subtheme 1: Professional Growth Depends on Prior Position and Knowledge**

Participants' professional growth from the leadership development program varied based on their prior experience of positions and training. For example, Mr. Halpert stated, “So I think a lot of the benefits that school-level people got out of the program were . . . It was just different for me.” Additionally, Mr. Flenderson agreed with Mr. Halpert and connected it back to his training through higher education he stated that, “Having a master's in administration and a

master's in leadership it was basically just refreshers." Ms. Martin found that the leadership position that she sought was not one that was being focused on in the leadership development program.

A person's background matters when a district is conducting leadership training. Participants would have benefited from better communication regarding the focus of the leadership training and having the participants' prior knowledge taken into consideration.

### **Subtheme 2: Networking Allowed for Opportunity and Development of Collaboration**

The opportunity to interact and collaborate with fellow passionate professionals was seen as a common benefit shared by many of the participants. Mr. Halpert stated,

Yeah, that I wanted the opportunity to move through a campus administrative position at some point in time. Yeah, so it was I guess more networking and having that conversation about my position and my goal. So, it was a very narrow perspective. It was really about transitioning jobs, having the opportunity in this district. It wasn't really broadly focused, it was very specific to the district. And even specific people. That was a big takeaway for me. I very much realized I'm learning to interview and get this job with these people.

Additionally, Ms. Martin stated, "But just actually the group dynamic and hearing others and sharing out would probably be . . . for my own professional growth . . . about the same as the project. They would both be things that were valuable." Mr. Schrute agreed with Ms. Martin and Mr. Halpert by finding development through working in the group dynamic. He stated,

My goodness. I guess, like I said, the leadership skills but also it being focused on the district, I learned a lot more about the district I was working in because we did have that kind of leadership level and a lot of things going on through the networking and

collaborating as well as the tasks we were doing. I did learn a lot more about the district so that was helpful. And I had been with the district for a long time. Well, again, it probably made me more effective being within the district since I, at that point, knew more about the district I was working in. I had made more connections and things. I mean, at that time I was campus-based so I mean, I made connections, learned more about how things were really working at the district office level and then shortly thereafter I was asked to apply for a district-level position so it did kind of open my eyes more as to what my future job would entail with the different departments and things like that, so that was helpful. Sure. I mean, honestly, a lot of it was good, a lot of it was kind of busy work. So, a lot of us we were already leaders on our campuses so it took a lot of time away from what we were doing so it was frustrating at times. But I mean, overall an opportunity's an opportunity so whenever you can have some time to collaborate with other leaders or future leaders and learn from them, I think it's good. So, I like going into any kind of training or conference if you can walk away with one or two things, yes, it's beneficial. Not everything's going to benefit you but if you can walk away with a piece or two that can make you better at what you're doing or help you accomplish what you want to do, that's a good thing.

Ms. Beesly also agreed with the other participants, stating, "I think my perspective on having a network and having people I can go to either find like experiences or get feedback has been reinforced since I've been in a leadership role." The leadership development program brought together like-minded individuals searching to better themselves through fostering an environment of collaboration the program supported a network of teambuilding.

### **Subtheme 3: Application of Applied Skills Generated Personal Development**

Ms. Palmer, Ms. Vance, and Ms. Beesly all found value in the application of the development program through a capstone project, shadowing opportunity, and learning about the district. Ms. Palmer found personal development through the capstone project and learning about the district and stated,

So, some of the nuts and bolts of what I learned about paperwork and navigating the district policies and parent involvement support, which was good because then I was able to bring in more stakeholders. That was a learning curve. Yes, learn by doing. And talking to the different levels of people at both the district level, the school level, and the community level.

Additionally, Ms. Vance identified development through learning the philosophy of the district:

Well, the interesting thing was leadership since you never accomplish it. You're always learning and growing more. The different exercises we did where we developed a team with a better understanding . . . philosophical elements of leadership, I thought were very meaningful and gave me a better understanding and ability to answer questions as well as apply those things. Probably the application component because you have to learn and understand the theories they presented, process and practice them and then you had to canvass. It accomplished something while simultaneously continuing to learn and develop those applications. You always learn more when you do them, apply them. You had better questions and you have to put your own personal ideas and theories about yourself.

Ms. Beesly found a connection with all the aspects of the program related directly to the leadership position. She stated,



My professional growth and development . . . I think probably the projects, the projects that we did. We were tasked with doing a project that would impact the school on a whole school level and so I think regardless of what leader you wanted to be in the program, having to think on that scale was a good stepping stone to what you'd experience as a leader. So, I found the projects really helpful. I think just my own personal experience, I think that leadership and education specifically is so hard to hone that I really think the more time you can spend shadowing or with someone before you yourself make that leap has been the most valuable in my journey. So, going through the program I found those mentoring and shadowing opportunities the most valuable and now in my current role, I reach out to other [leaders], other different school districts, local leadership, to continue to get feedback on situations and make sure that we're in line as a district. I think my early thoughts on leadership have been reinforced even more now that I'm in it.

The use of applicable features in the leadership development program gave the participants the ability to connect theory to real life. Three out of eight participants related to this theme of application to their personal growth.

<b>Participants' perception of growth and development subthemes</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Growth/Development subthemes</b>
Ms. Martin	Subtheme 1 and 2
Ms. Vance	Subtheme 3
Ms. Palmer	Subtheme 3
Mr. Halpert	Subtheme 2
Mr. Scott	None
Mr. Schrute	Subtheme 2
Ms. Beesly	Subtheme 3
Mr. Flenderson	Subtheme 1

*Table 2.* Participants connection to growth and development subthemes

**Theme 2: Leadership Training Is More Valuable to Participants if the Training Is Perceived to Be Purposeful or Beneficial to Them Personally**

The capstone project was one common theme that was shared as a purposeful or beneficial aspect of the leadership development program that the participants felt connected to them personally. Ms. Martin and Ms. Palmer found that the capstone project was the most beneficial, “Well, we had to do a project. I don't remember the rubric for the project, but it was essentially some type of project that demonstrates leadership skills. My project was, myself and a colleague made training videos for the administration of cognitive and academic testing on the iPads. So, we made training videos that other [professionals] could use to train their staff and/or train themselves.” Ms. Martin continued,

Probably that, the project. I, honestly, was working on it throughout it, but you could kind of do what you needed to do, because everybody that was there was district working professionals, so they know we didn't have all kinds of time to be working on it. So, it was kind of on your own with some ramifications. With some . . . I'm trying to think of the right word. Without parameters set, that's really loose parameters. Well, because it had some application to what I was doing at the time. Some of the stuff that we were talking about was pretty theoretical in nature. At the time I did it, I was not a leader, so I was . . . It was called an “aspiring leaders’ course.” It's fun to talk about some of that stuff, but when it's not always applicable to what you're doing and you're caught in the middle of a day where you're trying to get a lot of other things done, that can be worse. It can be frustrating at times.

Ms. Palmer also found similar value interacting with professionals and working on the capstone project:

Also, I felt like the project . . . I would have liked for the project, even though I felt like it was useful in terms of what I was doing. Because it was something I was already doing. I felt like the project piece could have been a little bit more . . . I don't know. Leadership-oriented, I guess. I think we all made it leadership-oriented. But we had to create that rubric on our own. What that was going to look like. So, but I did like the fact that we worked through the book and that we had something concrete at the end. It wasn't just a book study. Or it wasn't just come up with a project. It was a little more designed than that. Navigate the pieces of the district and understand what policies we have to follow. Mr. Scott agreed with Mr. Martin when he stated, "The most purposeful part to me seemed to be the project. You would develop a project to better your campus and that way you got yourself out there to be the leader, to develop and create a project that would help your campus out. I mean, that's how I remember it, that's what I remember."

Mr. Scott, Mr. Halpert, Mr. Schrute all found that communication and discussions the cohort had been purposeful or beneficial to them personally. Mr. Scott also found peer interactions more personally valuable:

The most beneficial part of the growth and development was definitely interacting with all of these people that were like-minded people, that knew that there was more they could be doing on their campus or they knew that there was more that they could be doing in the district. So yeah, I enjoyed that portion of it, then getting to see and talk with people that saw more for themselves in the district and saw more for themselves at their campus. So that part I really enjoyed, just getting together with them and just talking with them. It was just a breath of fresh air where you get that and you're not around the standard teachers that are griping and moaning about the various things that we do as

teachers. We all do that, but having that air of like, “Oh, well I think we could do this, and we could make this do this,” and their ideas were so grandiose and I thought that I enjoyed being around those type of people. So, the program did that for me.

Mr. Halpert agreed with Mr. Scott when he stated,

The most important aspect of it, for me, was just really communicating to people about the transition from the position that I had to school leadership, because I was already in a district administrative position. And so, the content of the program was . . . I can't remember any specific learning. I actually had already had exposure to or with working actively with all of the content that we learned. For me, my participation was really more about just sending the message that the school administration was something that I wanted to do. The program was considered the pipeline to school administration. But I already worked directly with all of the people who were presenters and I worked on committees with them. And I have that big picture view of the school or the district as a whole and all its parts within it. We worked on resumes. We did the interview practice. That was valuable. Okay. Another valuable piece for me was just getting that perspective of what people in district leadership who are hiring principals were looking for. So, it wasn't so much about learning how to do the job. It was more about what the job in this district, I guess what it takes to get a job in school leadership in this district.

Furthermore, Mr. Schrute also found the people within the group the most personally beneficial saying,

Well, I like the collaboration and the people that were chosen to be in that group. I always like to learn from other people, especially when they're coming from different campuses, areas, grade levels, other departments within the district, to get a wider

perspective of things. And of course, some of the PDs and trainings and things, focusing on leadership skills and whatnot were definitely good at preparing you for that kind of role and those kinds of views. I don't know. I mean, there were things within the program, again, that I found useful. The only reason I would say perhaps it could be better from my university experiences with leadership training was that it was related directly to the district so that was good because it was first-hand knowledge of what went on and things that are happening and how things are working here. Other than that, I mean, I got stuff out of it but a lot of it was, to be honest, we were kind of the busy workers to help with different government program applications and things like that that weren't necessarily helpful to us individually, but for the district it was helpful.

Ms. Vance and Ms. Beesly also found actionable aspects of the program, i.e., interview prep, resume writing, and job shadowing were the most personally beneficial. Ms. Vance stated,

The ones that related directly to the three things were very helpful. We applied them to what we're doing now as well as to the next step, including interview techniques, resume techniques, interviewing techniques as well as the on-campus projects we completed. Because it took the theory and brought it to practical application.

Ms. Beesly cited a certain aspect of the program as the most beneficial,

Definitely the shadowing opportunity. I think in education there's nothing like doing the job, so having the opportunity to watch people who are in those positions and being able to spend time and ask questions because of kids, parents, teachers, they're all different and messy and there's not a handbook for every situation. So, I found the most valuable shadowing opportunities to spend with those that were already doing their job. I think it's the most important part because it's hard to script what you're going to encounter in

education so being able to see like situations that when you're in the position of the leader you can refer to those things, as outlines. I found it most valuable because it gives me a frame of reference for other situations I'll encounter in the future. It gave me a network where I could go back and ask questions.

The seven out of eight participants broke down into three categories regarding the leadership development program being personally beneficial or purposeful.

<b>Participants perception of what was purposeful or beneficial to them personally cross-referenced to growth and development subthemes</b>		
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Purposeful or beneficial to them personally</b>	<b>Growth/Development subthemes</b>
Ms. Martin	Project/People	1 and 2
Ms. Vance	Project/People/Actionable aspects	3
Ms. Palmer	Project/People	3
Mr. Halpert	Actionable aspects/People	2
Mr. Scott	Project/People	None
Mr. Schrute	People	2
Ms. Beesly	Actionable aspects	3
Mr. Flenderson	Nothing	1

*Table 3.* Cross-reference of what was purposeful/beneficial to them personally and growth/development subthemes

### **Theme 3: Differentiation of Learning and Skill Set Would Be**

#### **More Beneficial to Participants**

The district leadership development program is a unique program because it encourages participants from different positions with different leadership goals to come together to grow and develop. This was the notion that Mr. Scott came into the program thinking but realized quickly that the expectation of the facilitators was for participants to earn a higher degree stated, “. . . it

was almost an expectation that you start your master's and do that stuff, and that was where I kind of fell short.” Mr. Scott also explained that he was unable to complete the program because of a mixture of other obligations. Mr. Scott clarified if he would participate in the program again,

No. I wouldn't because I understood that they got a message across to me pretty early on in those meetings that it doesn't really matter what we do in those meetings, it really matters if you have your master's. So, I'm going to save my time and energy, and even though it didn't cost me anything, and like I said I liked talking to those people, but it really wasn't going to benefit me at all by being there. I mean, I can meet and greet and do all that stuff and I can make all those relationships, but what they really said I needed was just to go get my master's and get my certificate in administration, and then I could move on and do that. So maybe after I got a master's, but I don't think I would need to do that course after I got a master's. So, once you get your master's, and that's what my big takeaway was from that was, you need your master's.

Ms. Martin found that the limitations set on education support personnel were challenging. She stated,

Well, in the schools, for [education support personnel] or anybody who's not a teacher, things are always teacher-focused. I get it because there are a lot more teachers than there are other people. So, it makes a lot of sense that it is geared that way. But, when you're in another profession, sometimes the things get focused on. Or, in this case, it was really focused on administration, so principals and assistant principals. Some of that applies to what we do, but not a lot of it applies. So, it was about teachers. More so, just more

individualized. . . . What's the teaching word? Differentiation of instruction. So, remembering that not everybody's in there to be a principal.

Mr. Halpert would have liked to have had more exposure to student discipline. He stated,

I literally remember thinking, "I don't know if I'm going to know how to discipline students." I was a parent. I discipline my own kids. I was a classroom teacher. I learned how to have great classroom management. I had great relationships with culture with kids. But I felt like a big part of my job as [administrator] would be disciplining the students. And I didn't know what the guidelines were for that. I didn't know what I could say and what I couldn't say. It seems so silly now, but at the time, that's what made me most nervous. So, I actually reached out to some [colleagues] and said, "Can I sit in on some discipline conversations with you? Can I just see how you work this process?" So, I did that on my own. And that was really helpful.

Ms. Beesly thought the program needed to add more coaching on social/emotional situations to better prepare leaders. She stated,

I think with the trends in education right now, more social/emotional support for students and families would have been something I would have liked at that point, but I don't think we were at the level of concern that we are now. So, I think that if I were going to a program at this point, I would want to see how are we supporting our kids and our teachers and our families on that social/emotional level because it's an issue for people these days. I would, I definitely would, because I think the more experiences that you have and the broader experiences that you have just made you that much more equipped for whatever role you want to pursue in leadership, so I would do it again. Now I would have some suggestions about what pieces I'd like to see. If I was asked "What topics



would you like to see?" social/emotional would be one of them. How are schools and districts handling self-harm, but those are just the things that are coming to mind right away.

Ms. Palmer focused more exposure on people in a career path she was possibly interested in with a combination of learning about the district and less about the book by stating,

Well, my feeling what it was going to be was a little bit different than what it ended up being. I thought that it was going to be a little bit more about the actual work being a teacher on assignment within the school district. So, I think I would have liked to hear from more APs and principals if they'd had some of them come in and talk to us about their jobs. I'd feel like that would have been more useful. I feel like if we had heard more from some of the administration from the district itself and have them talk to us a little bit more. It was very student-guided. And again, I liked the book, but I could have read the book on my own. You know. And not gotten together with the whole group and worked through the book. I wasn't expecting it to be more of a book study than an actual tutorial on this is what leadership looks like at the district. Because I don't feel like I came away with a clear knowledge of what that really looks like.

Ms. Palmer also felt that there needed to have more visualization and structure to the potential career change:

I felt it was more like here's how to write your resume. Here's how to get hired. More than it was, here's what it's gonna look like. I don't feel like I came away with a clear idea of that. I got the feeling from my talks with people that they were anticipating it to be a little bit more this is what the job is going to look like that too. When I think about a leadership program like that, I think about a training program. This is . . . we're gonna

train you. Like a college class. And this is how we're gonna train you to be in leadership within the district. And this is what we're looking for. And this is what we . . . a little bit more than just self-guided generic qualities of a leader and that kind of stuff. I mean, I already felt like I knew all of that.

Ms. Vance found the experience helpful but would have liked more detailed examples as she stated,

Oh, I'm thinking of the time I would have liked more examples. When you were talking about secret savvy to health foods. The positive examples as well as the negative examples of why it doesn't work or like true videotaping of somebody or YouTube videos or something just to describe this won't work or does not work. Let me show you why it does work. Let's examine the components that cause positive working elements that work well. "Oh, I need to redo my resume right now and not put that off until next year." Probably I would have been motivated to do further reading beyond the text that they had assigned to us. Maybe those were two things I would have chosen.

Mr. Schrute wasn't sure at first but found that more real-world experiences would be more helpful. He stated,

I don't know. A lot of the leadership kind of things are similar. You know, you learn your leadership style in various ways and different things like that. I would have liked . . . and what I really enjoyed from my college courses . . . were more like in-basket kind of scenarios and things like that. Like real-world opportunities, or real-world examples of things that had happened and occurred and let us try to problem solve and work through them. Maybe hearing more from other leaders around the district. To have different principals come in. We do that a little bit. There was like one or two days where we got

to interview a new principal. There actually were some opportunities for us to go fill in on campuses for assistant principals here or there, which was definitely beneficial. But, yeah, more real-world experiences, really focusing on that, I think better prepares leaders because hearing from a principal or a district leader that really went through a tough time and letting you think about how you would handle that if you were in that situation.

Discussing it, sharing out, having that kind of opportunity, then hearing what they did do, I find it incredibly beneficial and workable with my brain as I start thinking about my leadership and where I'm going and what I would do. I personally would have liked a lot more of that. And I had a few college courses, through the university for my master's where we did do that and they're probably the ones I learned the most from.

Ms. Martin wished the logistics of the program would be more conducive to a range of participants:

Well, it would be nice if it was during school hours as compared to outside of school hours, because that would make it a little more reasonable to have attended and not as much of a pain. But I mean . . . again, what I said about gearing it toward . . . not just gearing it toward one set of people.

Mr. Flenderson found that there needed to be more differentiation based on prior knowledge, Because it's very limited in its perspective. Again, its two authors and their approach to leadership style and there's so many theories out there. Various types of leadership qualities other than just the ones used by the authors here. They used very simplistic terms like "model the way," "encourage the heart," "challenge the process," "enable others to act and inspire." It doesn't talk about anything like transactional leadership, transformational leadership. It doesn't talk about any of the modern theories used.

Mr. Halpert stressed the need for balance within the program. He stated,

I guess I just think that, reflecting on all of this, that the most important thing that any program does is find a balance between the logistical things that the person has to know, like the HR processes and district policies and all those logistics that they teach. But there's so much content to learn that part of it is just knowing where to find that information when you need it. There's no way to learn all of it before you start the job. A lot of it is about knowing the right people to ask and knowing the right places to go to find that information when you do need it in the future. And the other part is just helping people develop their reflective skills so that, when they come to those difficult human interactions, they know not how they're going to handle it but they know that they need to be reflective and pay attention to their own heart . . . when they're working through them. And that goes back to the student discipline piece. That was way easier than I ever thought it would be. It was really just about having honest conversations with people and wanting the best for them. And so, I guess that's what it all comes to for me is that as a leader you have to want the best for the people that you're working with. And there's no training for that. That's really about learning to be a reflective person who knows what they value.

<b>Cross-reference of supportive of goal, purposeful/beneficial personally and growth/development subthemes</b>			
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Differentiation beneficial</b>	<b>Purposeful or beneficial to them personally</b>	<b>Growth/Development subthemes</b>
Ms. Martin	Yes	Project/People	1 and 2
Ms. Vance	Yes	Project/People/Actionable aspects	3
Ms. Palmer	Yes	Project/People	3
Mr. Halpert	Yes	Actionable aspects/People	2

Mr. Scott	Yes	Project/People	None
Mr. Schrute	Yes	People	2
Ms. Beesly	Yes	Actionable aspects	3
Mr. Flenderson	Yes	Nothing	1

*Table 4.* Cross-reference of supportive of goal and purposeful/beneficial personally

#### **Theme 4: Perception of Leadership Development Program Regarding Personal Goal**

Out of the fourteen participants on the demographic questionnaire, twelve stated that they applied to be a part of the leadership development program with the motivation of furthering their career. Out of those twelve that stated this goal, six of them agreed to give an interview. The participants gave a wide spectrum of perceptions of support toward their goal from “no” to “I think generally” to “Absolutely.”

Mr. Halpert expressed a common feeling that “The program was considered the pipeline to school administration.” And the majority of the participants that completed the demographic questionnaire expressed a desire to further their career as a result of participating in the leadership development program. At the completion of the program is where the participants’ perceptions alter. For example, Mr. Halpert found benefit in the program but did not find a direct correlation between participating in the program and advancing his career, saying,

The person who ended up hiring me . . . was not an in-district person. So, I don't know if she knew anything about the program. So, I may have gotten the job anyway. But I think that doing the program made me feel confident in applying because applying for this position was just the next step.

Mr. Flenderson also had a similar feeling prior to engaging in the program but after completion of the program felt that “people not going through the program get promoted vs. people that go through the program, even though it was suggested that one must go through the program to be promoted.” Mr. Flenderson also went further to suggest that the district should broaden their

qualifications to education support personnel who do not hold an elementary teaching certificate.

Ms. Palmer agreed with Mr. Halpert and Mr. Flenderson and stated,

One of my goals is to move into a different type of position in the school district.

Participating in the program supported my ability to communicate with all the levels in a way that we can manage. Do I feel like it really prepared me to be a leader in the district?

No, I don't know that it really did.

Ms. Martin questioned whether she would engage in the program again knowing what she knows now:

Honestly, part of me says yes and part of me says no. I'm sure there are things that I'm utilizing that I learned about in my new leadership position and I don't know that it really helped me to gain a leadership position. So, in that regard, my time is valuable, having two young children and all that sort of stuff. So, I mean, if I look at it, hindsight being 20/20, probably not. But I didn't hate it or anything. I just . . . I don't think it's done tons for me. I think it really matters if you're going to try to become a principal or assistant principal. If you took that course, I think that matters. I don't think it mattered that I took the course to become the lead [education support personnel].

Additionally, Mr. Schrute shared the mindset that any development helps. He stated,

I think, generally, yeah. I mean, it doesn't hurt to be a part of a program to show that you're learning and willing to give some of your time to continue your knowledge and those kinds of things. I don't think specifically me doing that got me the position I'm in now. If anything, knowing the people who were in charge, it was probably in spite of that, because of the political things up at the district level. But it definitely, again, didn't hurt but did it directly affect me now in getting my position? I would say probably not.

Four out of eight participants interviewed perceived that the program supported them in reaching their goal. For example, Mr. Scott stated,

Yes, very much so. Like I said with the professionalism and it engaged me with people that were like-minded and optimistic. I enjoyed that portion of it and it occupied me well beyond the amount of time I had available after I got rolling. So, yeah, it was a good level and it does really challenge you as a leader to bring together all of the people on your campus and to reach out. So, I did, I liked that.

Also, Ms. Vance stated,

Absolutely. Well, it's in-house so it gave you the insight of what was happening here in which I appreciate always seeing the bigger picture because we were kindergarten through high school and no outside across the district of people that we work with so that was very informative. They modeled interviews. The people that read resumes came in and talked with you and they represented the theory philosophy of leadership of the district.

Additionally, Ms. Beesly stated, "I do, and I was the leader of the group at that point, so it not only helped me with my leadership goals, but it helped me probably promote faster than had I not. Furthermore, Mr. Halpert stated, "I got the job. Not sure if being part of the program got me the job but I felt more confident in applying because I was part of the program and ready to move to the next step."

<b>Cross-reference of differentiation beneficial, supportive of goal, purposeful/beneficial personally and growth/development subthemes</b>				
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Differentiation beneficial</b>	<b>Supportive of goal</b>	<b>Purposeful or beneficial to them personally</b>	<b>Growth/Development subthemes</b>
Ms. Martin	Yes	"I would say kind of"	Project/People	1 and 2
Ms. Vance	Yes	"Absolutely"	Project/People/ Actionable aspects	3
Ms. Palmer	Yes	"No, I don't know that it really did."	Project/People	3
Mr. Halpert	Yes	"I got the job" but not sure	Actionable aspects/People	2
Mr. Scott	Yes	"Yes, very much so"	Project/People	None
Mr. Schrute	Yes	"I think, generally, yeah"	People	2
Ms. Beesly	Yes	"I do"	Actionable aspects	3
Mr. Flenderson	Yes	"No"	Nothing	1

*Table 5.* Cross-reference of all themes and subthemes

Based on the participant's responses the district leadership development program should differentiate more by assessing a person's skill, attributes, and goals to give individual support but not lose the combination of the type of participant.

### **Physical Artifact**

Participants were asked to present a physical artifact that represented or held meaning for them regarding leadership development. The following tables are based on Peirce's triadic model using what the artifact is (object), the meaning (representamen), and the researcher's interpretation (interpretant). The purpose of having a physical artifact was to add another layer of understanding of how the participant thought. The majority of the artifacts presented were found in the participants' office or classroom. To protect the participant's identity the researcher does not connect the participant's pseudonym to the artifact.



## Artifact 1

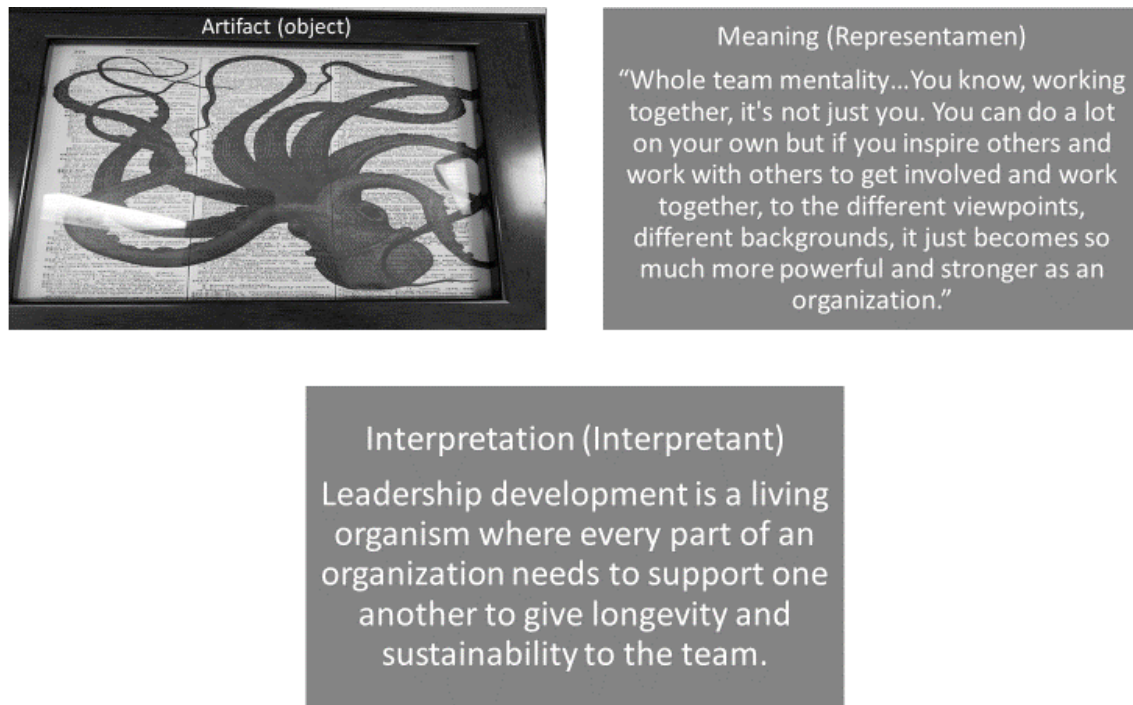
The object presented was a picture of an octopus as seen below.



Figure 12. Artifact 1: Photo of an Octopus printed on words

The meaning that the participant presented was as follows, “Well, I mean, it kind of affected the whole team mentality, I guess. You know, working together, it’s not just you. You can do a lot on your own but if you inspire others and work with others to get involved and work together, with the different viewpoints, different backgrounds, it just becomes so much more powerful and stronger as an organization and I think that kind of symbolizes that.”

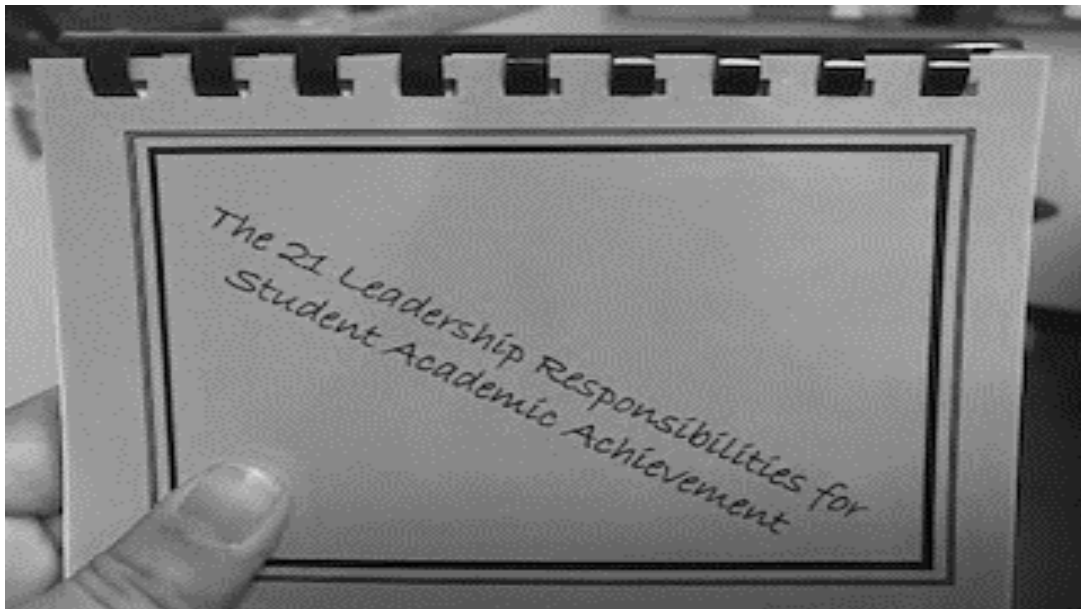
The interpretation of the data presented is that leadership development is a living organism where every part of an organization needs to support one another to give longevity and sustainability to the team. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 13.



*Figure 13. Triangulation of Artifact 1: Octopus*

## **Artifact 2**

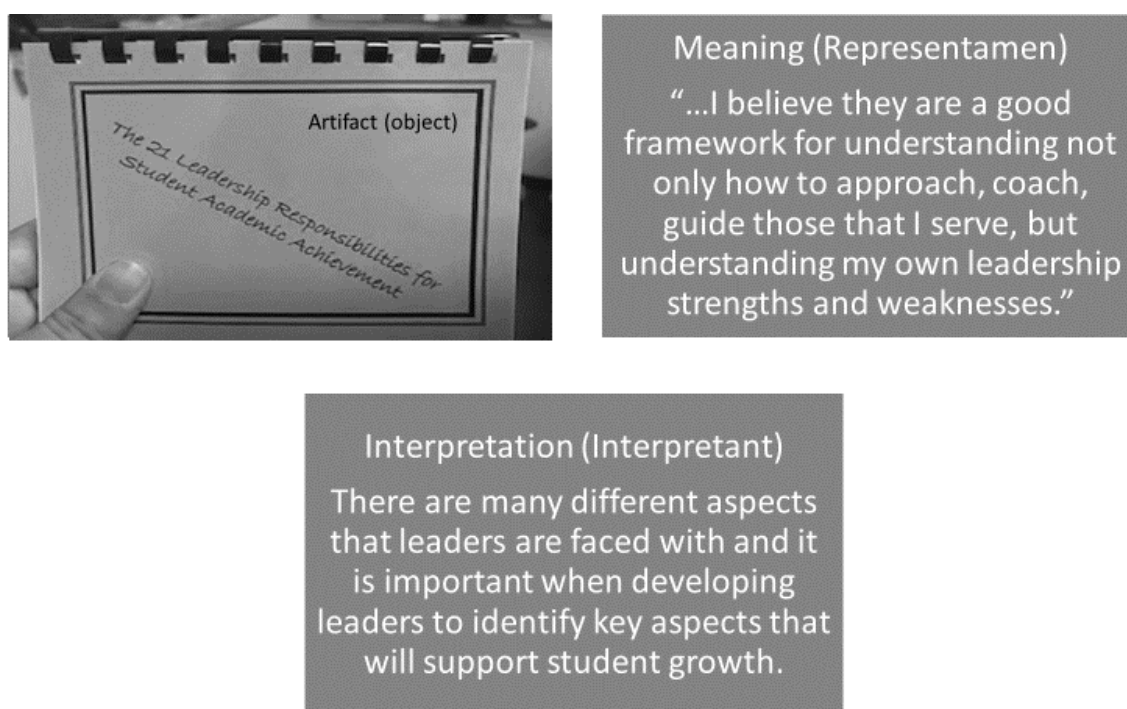
The object presented was a picture of a flipchart seen below.



*Figure 14. Artifact 2: Flipchart*

The participant stated the following meaning, “Leadership Artifact: These 21 principles have guided me through decision making of all kinds. I believe they are a good framework for understanding not only how to approach, coach, and guide those that I serve, but understanding my own leadership strengths and weaknesses.”

The interpretation of the data presented that there are many different aspects that leaders are faced with and it is important when developing leaders to identify key aspects that will support student growth. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 15.



*Figure 15.* Triangulation of Artifact 2: Flipchart

### Artifact 3

The object presented was a picture of a thank you note given to the participant.

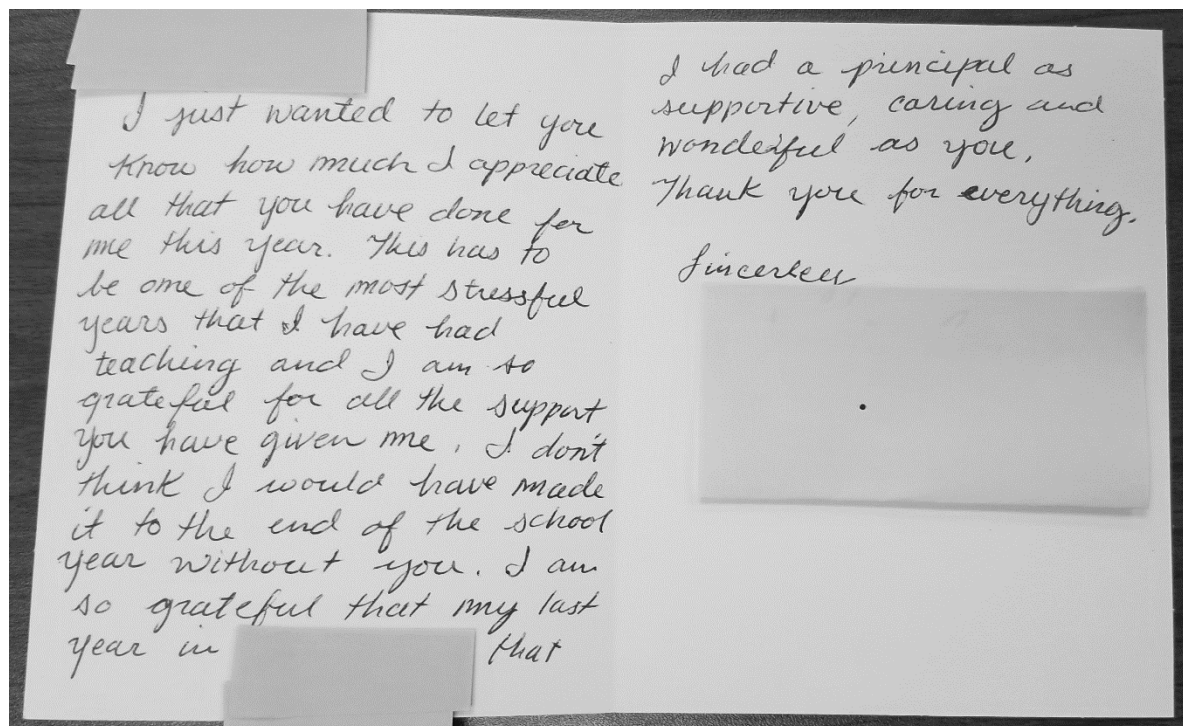


Figure 16. Artifact 3: Thank you note

The participant explained the meaning of the artifact as,

The artifact is a thank you note that I received from a teacher that I evaluated out of her teaching position. It's painful to be in a position where you're changing somebody's life in a way that they don't necessarily want it to be changed. And you're working through a lot of crucial conversations and making judgment calls about what's best for another adult human being and a lot of little human beings. And I consider it a huge responsibility. And it's one of the hardest responsibilities in this job. And so, to walk away from that position receiving a thank you, very heartfelt appreciation from her, tells me that . . . It confirmed that I did the right thing, but that I did it in a way that maintained her dignity. And that is so important because we can handle people in difficult situations

in any number of ways. And the best way is always an end result that is good for everyone and maintains that person's wellbeing in the process. And so, I felt good in the end that I was able to do that with her in a dignified and mutually respectful way.

The interpretation of the data presented that the philosophy of leadership development can only support the growth of a leader to a point. To fully develop as a leader, one must be faced with challenging situations that have real-life consequences to fully grasp the magnitude of what it means to be a leader. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 17.

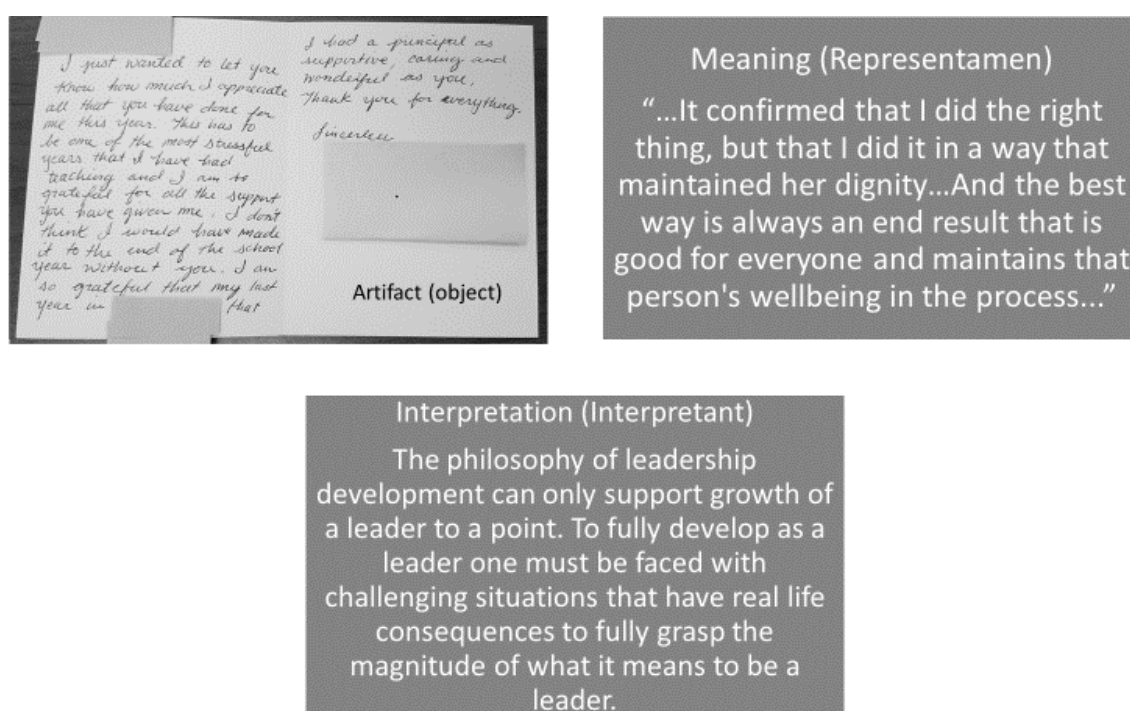


Figure 17. Triangulation of Artifact 3: Thank you note

#### Artifact 4

The object presented was a picture of Goodwill with words of encouragement.



*Figure 18.* Artifact 4: Goodwill photo

The meaning that the participant presented was, “Yes. I brought a picture of Goodwill because it pushes people to be better. So, people that maybe were drug-addicted at one point, they go there, they get a job. They figure out how to do that job, they figure out how to show up to work, all that stuff. Then they go on and do something better. Leadership is the same thing.”

The interpretation of the data presented was that a great leader creates an environment that empowers, motivates and develops/coaches’ people to be their best selves just as leadership development should. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 19.



*Figure 19. Triangulation of Artifact 4: Goodwill photo*

#### **Artifact 5**

The object presented as a web link to a TedTalk by Heffernan M.

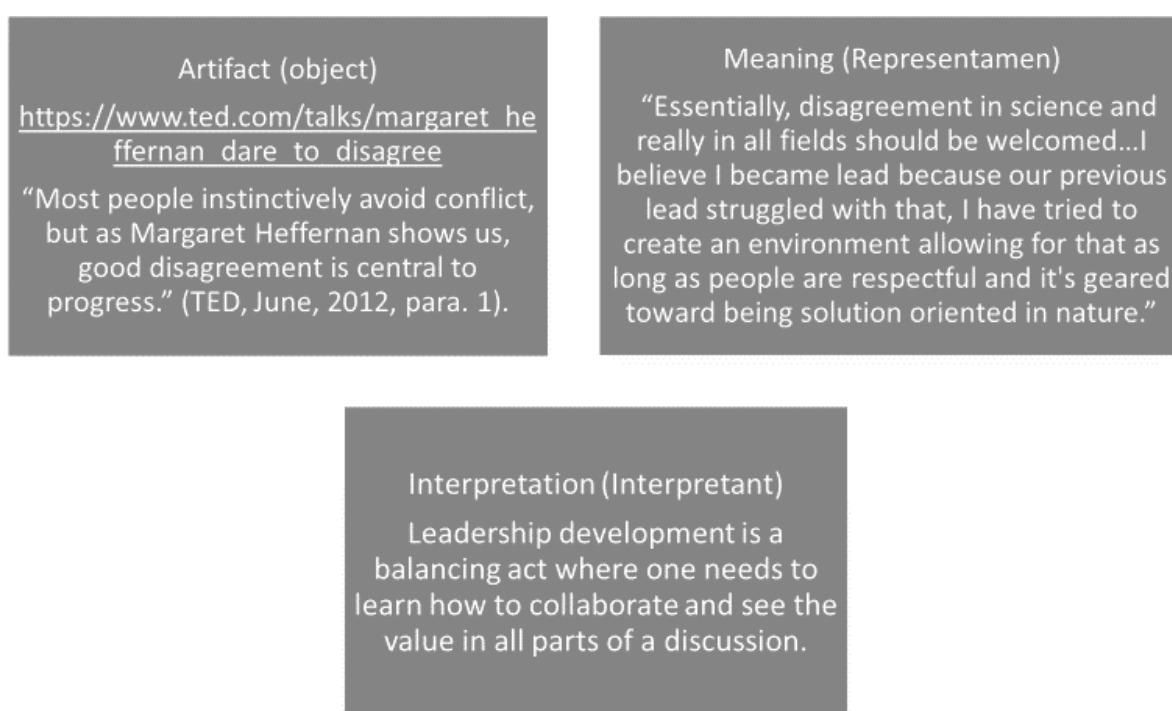
[https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret\\_heffernan\\_dare\\_to\\_disagree](https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree) “Most people instinctively avoid conflict, but as Margaret Heffernan shows us, good disagreement is central to progress. She illustrates (sometimes counterintuitively) how the best partners aren’t echo chambers—and how great research teams, relationships, and businesses allow people to deeply disagree” (TED, June, 2012, para. 1). For a leader to avoid conflict causes a negative effect on the environment of the organization. Leaders need to foster an open relationship with their employees to build a stronger foundation for the team to move forward.

The participant described the meaning of the artifact as,

Essentially, disagreement in science and really in all fields should be welcomed. It can be hard to not remember that a person having a discussion of disagreement isn’t

threatening. I believe I became lead because our previous lead struggled with that, I have tried to create an environment allowing that as long as people are respectful and it's geared toward being solution-oriented in nature. If you have a complaint, that's awesome, what's your idea to fix what you're complaining about?

The interpretation of the data presented was that leadership development is a balancing act where one needs to learn how to collaborate and see the value in all parts of a discussion. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 20.

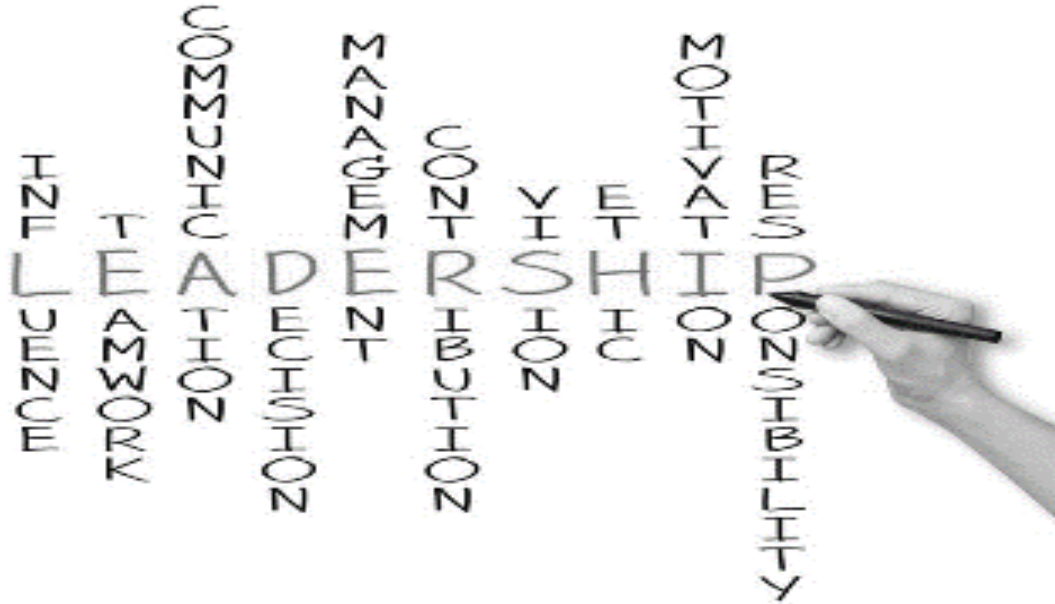


*Figure 20.* Triangulation of Artifact 5: TedTalk Heffernan, M. "Dare to Disagree"



## Artifact 6

The object presented was an acrostic poem of elements of leadership.



*Figure 21.* Artifact 6: Photo of acrostic poem of leadership traits

The meaning that the participant presented was, “This little graphic summarizes the many elements of leadership that I have learned about over the years and the skills/concepts that I need to continue to develop. It is a quick reminder that leadership is not one skill but many skills integrated and kept in balance. When a project is a challenge or I have a task to complete, looking at this quick reminder I have a self-check to evaluate if I am bringing all the needed elements to the task. Then upon seeing a shortfall, I search out help/answers through literature, online resources, coworkers, etc.”

The interpretation of the data presented was that leadership is not inherent but can be developed through the use of concepts that help guide the leader to keep a balanced approach

when dealing with situations. The triangulation of the physical artifact is presented below in figure 22.

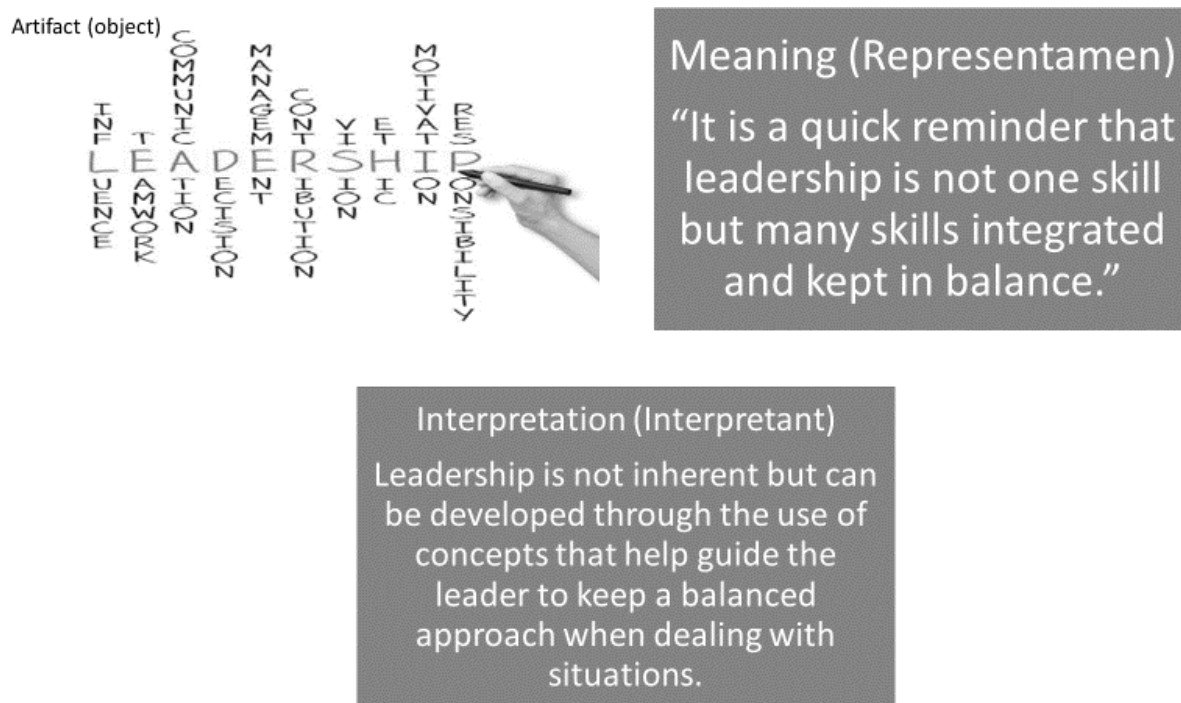


Figure 22. Triangulation of Artifact 6: Photo of acrostic poem of leadership traits

### Summary

All the participants were given the same instruction in regard to the physical artifact and the participants who were able to fulfill the request gave a deeper understanding of what drives them to be a leader. For example, artifact 1, the octopus, explained how the participant found value to teamwork and collaboration compared to artifact 3, the thank you note, which was an example of how to support your team and make the hard decisions. Both explained how a leader needs to view the big picture but explained it in different ways. Additionally, artifact 2, the flipchart, artifact 4, the Goodwill photo, and artifact 6, the acrostic poem, all focused on skills or tools that a leader could use or a leadership program could utilize to prepare a leader to handle situations. Furthermore, artifact 5, the TedTalk link, focused on communication and how a leader

needs to be open to creating an environment that allows for disagreement to help support the organization to move forward. Understanding participants' motivation or how they approach a situation was valuable in the interpretation process. Every artifact gave a unique window into what kind of leader the participant was or the type of leader they wanted to become.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This collective case study started with three main concepts concerning leadership development, K–12 succession planning, and perceptions of participants of a leadership development program. These three concepts evolved into the purpose of exploring the perspective of educators who engaged in a district leadership development program and how these participants describe their leadership development experience. Furthermore, the researcher explored the perceived benefits the program had on participants' professional growth and development. Through the use of in vivo coding, constant comparative method and nonindexical analysis on the physical artifact, the researcher hoped to gain a holistic view of the participants' experience.

#### **Review of Research Questions and Summary of Responses**

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How do public, K–12 educators describe their leadership development as a result of a district-level leadership development program?

RO<sub>2</sub>: What aspects of leadership development do K–12 educators perceive as most beneficial to their professional growth and development?

All participants of the interview portion of the study found that the program could be more supportive if the leadership development program differentiated more to meet the individual's needs and goals. Ms. Vance, Mr. Scott, and Ms. Beesly found the program supported their personal and professional goals completely. Ms. Martin, Mr. Halpert, and Mr. Schrute were indecisive about whether the program completely supported their personal and professional goals, compared to Mr. Flenderson and Ms. Palmer, who were adamant that the program did not support their personal and professional goals for the future.

There were three themes that were identified as purposeful or beneficial to the participant personally: the capstone project, the people, and the actionable aspects. Ms. Martin, Ms. Vance, Ms. Palmer, and Mr. Scott all agreed that the capstone project and the people within the group were the most purposeful or beneficial personally. Ms. Beesly and Mr. Halpert both found that the actionable aspects of the program, i.e., job shadowing, purposeful but Mr. Halpert felt that the people in the program were beneficial as well. Mr. Schrute personally found that the people were the most beneficial aspect of the program. Furthermore, Mr. Flenderson found nothing in the leadership development program to be personally beneficial.

There were three subthemes identified for theme one that all but one participant identified with:

*Subtheme 1:* Professional growth depends on prior position and knowledge.

*Subtheme 2:* Networking allowed for opportunity and development of collaboration.

*Subtheme 3:* Application of applied skills generated personal development.

Ms. Martin was the only participant that fell within subtheme one and two connecting her professional growth with network-enabled growth and development. Mr. Flenderson was the only other participant to identify with subtheme one, drawing on his prior experience as being the most valuable to his growth and development. Mr. Halpert and Mr. Schrute both shared a connection with subtheme two regarding networking as a way the program supported opportunities and development of collaboration. Ms. Vance, Ms. Palmer, and Ms. Beesly found that the applied skills generated their personal development.

Six out of eight participants that are either K–12 teachers or education support personnel felt that the leadership development program supports growth and development when it is differentiated based on participants' unique skill sets and personal goals. All stakeholders' needs

and desires support clearer expectations being presented by all stakeholders to create the right mindset of the cohort. This mindset supports participants' ability to collaborate and network, which supports a stronger ability to fulfill the expectations for all parties. The artifacts all gave a perception of leadership development that must be purposeful, and working as a team is more valuable to oneself and the organization.

The aspects of leadership development that K–12 educators perceive as most beneficial to their professional growth and development were the facilitators within the program, the capstone project where participants lead or created something to support their campuses, the ability to network, group discussions, and actionable aspects of the program. The program was perceived as a pipeline for career advancement, but as participants came from different backgrounds and positions, different aspects of the program were found more purposeful to each participant's leadership development. All participants shared a view of improving the leadership program to better support individual needs as well as all stakeholders needs.

### **Interpretation and Alignment of Findings with Literature**

Minimal research was found on educators' perception of leadership development at a district level, confirming the importance of the focus of this research study. Symbolic interactionism theory was the conceptual framework that the researcher used to understand how people interacted with the leadership development program. This theory focuses on a small-scale perspective of interactions between individuals to objects, events, ideas, and other people. The following question was asked of the participants: If you could go back and go through the program again, would you? This question was cross-referenced with the participant's goal prior to engaging in the program. This analysis was performed to gain a better understanding of how the meaning of the program had changed for the participant based on his or her goal prior to

beginning the program. The findings of this research support that participants' views or meaning of the program had changed since their interaction with the development program.

Simkins et al. (2009) suggested that the best way to train future leaders was to give them "work-shadowing" or the closest hands-on experience possible. Six out of the eight participants agreed that either the capstone project or the actionable aspects of the program were the most purposeful or beneficial to them personally. The leadership development program utilized a form that Simkins et al. (2009) referred to as "Pure shadowing," where observing the head at work was the primary activity and discussions with the head were framed by the issues that arose from the activities observed. As one head put it to his participant, he was "not going to change anything for my benefit" and she would see everything, although the rule of confidentiality excluded her from some situations with staff and parents.

Simkins et al. (2009) suggested that actionable applications supported different experiences within that position, giving the organization the opportunity to collect data on the potential leader to support a strong succession plan. The findings of this research support Simkins et al. (2009) but argued that the participants who engaged in hands-on learning found the leadership training more personally valuable and supported their personal goals.

Johnson and Donaldson (2007) suggested that educators need different directions to follow within the education field if a district wants to have success in the long term. Participants in this study agreed with Johnson and Donaldson (2007), who argued that the district needs to see value in giving more options within the leadership.

Earley et al. (2009) studied perceptions of school roles as detractors for potential candidates. This study found the perception that the district hires more leaders from outside the district, who did not participate in the leadership development program. Six out of the eight

participants all were motivated to advance their career before entering the leadership program but only two strongly believed that the program supported their goal.

Conger and Fulmer (2003) stated, “By monitoring the pipeline for these jobs, companies can focus development programs on ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate talent” (p. 79). Six out of the eight participants saw the leadership development program as a “pipeline” for a leadership position, but there was a disconnect of monitoring the potential candidates, as there was no data on the participants prior to three years ago. The creation of a “leadership pipeline” (Fuller et al., 2017; Korach & Cosner, 2017) should be intentional, using strategies to recruit individuals with potential in the area of shortage or foreseen shortage. Two out of the fourteen demographic participants stated that they were asked personally to apply for the leadership development program. All the other candidates applied independently. Myung et al. (2011) suggested that there are two ways a person gains a leadership position. “Tapping” or sponsored mobility, occurs when a principal selects a candidate based on individual feeling compared to “contest mobility” where all the candidates have an equal chance to attain a position through fair and open procedures based on their merits. Based on this study the district is doing a mixture of these two methods, suggesting that the district needs to continue to develop its pipeline to better support a successful succession plan.

Karaevli and Hall (2002) stressed that there is no *best* path when it comes to succession planning. The findings from this study support this statement, with all the participants agreeing that differentiation based on a person’s prior experience and the goal would be valuable to them. The development process of a leader is more effective when a succession plan is aligned to the organization's goal, reinforces the organization's vision, empowers employees, and explores strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Cohn et al., 2005). This study found that two out



of the eight participants found it purposeful or beneficial when aspects of the leadership development program were connected to the district's goals, vision, and mission.

Conger and Fulmer (2003) found that a succession plan needs to be as transparent as possible to all stakeholders if a district wants it to be effective. Six out of the eight participants expressed the feeling that their perceptions of the program and its actual impact were not aligned. Understanding what options a person has within their career is important, and was found in this study to be valuable in a potential participant's perceptions of a leadership development program.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Action**

#### **Improvements to the Leadership Development Program**

Normore (2007) found that “Successful school districts provide well-structured leadership development opportunities and experiences by capitalizing in [the] long-term investment of time, energy, attention, and resources to professional development programs” (Normore 2007, p. 8). The district program examined in this study seemed to start this process by creating the leadership development program, but to fully receive the benefits from their investment the district needs to create an environment that is structured to identify potential leaders at every stage of their career giving the development program scalability (Sparks, 2017).

As an organization creates a pipeline of potential leaders it is vital that the organization monitors the past participants to ensure an adequate supply of candidates is available (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). To accomplish this the district should collect data on all participants and the data should be stored in a district-controlled database to avoid loss of data if the facilitator leaves the district. Then there needs to be monitoring of participants both during and after the program to avoid the potential risk of losing promising candidates.

All participants felt that the leadership development program needed to differentiate more on the individual based on his or her prior experience and goals. Conger and Fulmer (2003) found that there needs to be a balance between cultivating new leaders and supporting growth at the appropriate level taking into consideration the background of the employee. The recommendation would be to have different groups within the program focusing on different aspects of advancement within the district so participants still have the ability to collaborate but at the same time feel as though the program is differentiated to support individual needs.

There are no best fits-all. When it comes to planning for a school district's future every organization needs to develop a plan that is right for them and realize that it might not work the first, second, or even the third time (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hart, 1993). Once an organization hones a growth mindset to cultivate employees' skills their accomplishments could be limitless (Capozzi, 2018). A supportive way of creating this growth mindset would be to identify clear expectations for the program and verify if the expectations are being met, tracking participants' progress by sending out surveys or assigning mentors beyond the leadership development program. It is important that participants feel that the district is supportive and invested in them if the district goal is to create a successful succession plan.

### **Benefits of the Leadership Development Program**

The leadership development program in its current state has shown to have the ability to bring like-minded individuals together to support networking, professionalism, and opportunities that were felt personally beneficial to seven out of eight participants. The program design encouraged collaboration among peers and stakeholders. Through discussions, participants felt a connection to what the values of the district were and the expectations of them being part of the program.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Succession planning has been shown to be vital to the success of an organization, but there needs to be more research relating this practice to education at the state, district, and school level. Perception is a very powerful aspect of a person's understanding of their surroundings. There needs to be more research on how educators are being perceived professionally and how they perceive their role as a professional. Exploring perceptions of this group of individuals could be beneficial in resolving the shortage of viable candidates for leadership roles.

District leadership development programs need to be examined. Many districts are taking on this endeavor but there is little research on how beneficial a program is at a district level. Based on this research there are possible connections, but further research is needed to define direct alignment. Furthermore, a further examination into how the district uses the data collected from the participants in their program in relation to succession planning could be valuable to understand how a district could improve their ability to cultivate potential candidates.

Succession planning in education needs further research to better understand the challenges districts face when embarking on this journey. There has been ample research on how succession planning is beneficial for companies in the business sector and this research can be applied but it is not a direct correlation. Furthermore, there needs to be further study on how succession planning directly impacts students.

### **Conclusion**

Succession planning is one of the most impactful endeavors an organization can undertake and done well it will support longevity. Understanding educators' perspectives are extremely valuable when a district is embarking on succession planning. Learning how the value of something—in this case, the leadership development program—changes due to a person's

interaction with the program brings forth a clearer picture of the future of the program and the longevity of the district's leadership.

Ibarra (2005) suggested that companies use succession planning to not only develop their employees but to maintain a stronger workforce for today, tomorrow, and the future. As a district evolves over time the leadership development program should as well. Although the basic components of the program have basically stayed the same for the past five years, the facilitator of the leadership development program has changed. The participants found that the leadership of the program was "pivotal" to learning the district expectations and ultimately their success within the district. Additionally, a person's background matters when a district is conducting leadership training. Participants would have benefited by better communication regarding the focus of the leadership training and by taking into consideration the participants' prior knowledge.

The leadership development program brought together like-minded individuals searching to better themselves. Through fostering an environment of collaboration the program supported a network of teambuilding. The use of applicable features in the leadership development program gave the participants the ability to connect theory to real life. Two out of eight participants related to this theme of applying leadership development to their personal growth. This district needs to continue to evolve the leadership development program into a fully developed "pipeline" that could support the succession plan for many years to come.

Grouping people in categories can be very useful when attempting to understand how the group thinks about a situation, but to develop an individual into a great leader the development program needs to look at the macro and micro levels of the potential candidate. Capozzi (2017) describes this mindset as "growth mindset," a concept that people have the possibility to reach

their true potential with the right motivation and training. By learning what motivates a person an organization can better support the employee in accomplishing their goal, and if the vision is shared, both parties win. Pink (2011) suggested that over many years the model of incentives and punishment, or the carrot-and stick-mentality that has been used for the past century, is becoming irrelevant. The 21st-century worker requires autonomy, mastery, and purpose to support drive within an employee (Pink 2011). Educators, in general, support this concept because they feel an internal drive to support those around them even at a detriment to themselves regarding profits. These research findings and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (2013) survey supports Pink (2011) that educators are more engaged when given the ability to have autonomy toward a purposeful goal that is mutually beneficial to their career and the school/district.

Organizations are living organisms that are comprised of the people that work within all the different components. To support a successful succession plan, all parts need to be working at their fullest potential toward a common goal. It is important for a public school district to have a clear vision for the future to be able to cultivate the leaders of tomorrow.

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## APPENDIX A

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Leadership Development Questionnaire**

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a possible past participant in a district-level leadership development program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The purpose of this study was to explore how participants of a district level leadership training experienced leadership development. This research project will be conducted by Stephanie Sanschagrín at the University of New England. Stephanie Sanschagrín has taught in the elementary and middle schools for the past five years and has participated in the district leadership development program.

This study will be conducted in two parts. The first part involves filling in an online questionnaire, which will take approximately 15–20 minutes of your time. Your responses will be kept confidential and we do not collect identifying information such as your name or IP address. While you may not directly benefit from this research, the hope is that your participation in the study may benefit teacher leadership development.

You will be asked at the end of the questionnaire if you would be interested in partaking in the second part of this study, which is a 1:1 interview with me, Stephanie Sanschagrín. If you agree, you will be asked for your email address or phone number so that I can contact you to set up a time and date for the interview. All interviewees will be given a pseudonym to protect their identities. We will do our best to keep your information confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the questionnaires will not contain

information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with the University of New England representatives.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Stephanie Sanschagrin at (480) 779-8822 or [ssanschagrin@une.edu](mailto:ssanschagrin@une.edu).

This research has been reviewed according to the University of New England IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research-related injury, please contact Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Assistant Director of Curriculum and Research at (207) 221-4860 or [bparsons4@une.edu](mailto:bparsons4@une.edu)
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**PLEASE NOTE: THE UNE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD MAY REVIEW THE RESEARCH RECORDS.**

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS CONFIDENTIAL, PLEASE DO INCLUDE ANY INFORMATION THAT CAN IDENTIFY YOU UNLESS YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW.**

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicating that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

**I understand the above description of the research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I understand that by proceeding with this survey I agree to take part in this research and do so voluntarily.**

\* Required 1. If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

agree

disagree

2. Did you participate in a leadership development program at the district level? (Only if the participant selects “Yes” will the following questions appear.)

Yes

No

### **Background information**

Remember, if you do not feel comfortable answering any of the questions below, simply skip the question.

3. What is your age group? (dropdown bar)

18–24 years old

25–34 years old

35–44 years old

45–54 years old

55+

4. To which gender identity do you most identify? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin?

Yes

No

6. How would you describe yourself? Check all that apply.

American Indian or Alaska Native Asian

Black or African American Native

Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Other:

7. How long ago did you participate in the leadership development program? (dropdown bar)

1 year

2 years

3 years

4 years

5 years

5+ years

8. Did you graduate from the program?

Yes

No

9. Please give a short answer of why you were unable to complete the program. (Participants will only be directed to this section if they answer “No” on the prior question.)

10. What is the highest degree or level of school you completed prior to the leadership development program? (dropdown bar)

Bachelor’s degree (e.g. BA, BS)

Master’s degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)

Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)

Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)

11. What is the highest degree or level of school you completed since the leadership development program? (dropdown bar)

Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)

Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)

Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)

Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)

12. What position did you hold during the leadership development program?

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13. What is your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

14. What made you apply to be a participant of the leadership development program?

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15. Prior to the district leadership development program did you have any leadership training?

Yes

No

16. Please briefly explain the leadership training you had prior to the district leadership development program. (Participants will only be directed to this section if they answer "Yes" on the prior question.)

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### **Interview information**

Interview questions will be open-ended focusing on your perception.



17. Would you be interested in giving an interview? (Only if the participant selects “Yes” the following questions will appear.)

Yes

No

17. Thank you so much for being interested in giving an interview. Please provide the best way to contact you (e.g., email or phone number) so that an interview may be scheduled.

---

## APPENDIX B

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Step 1: Welcome and thank the participant for coming. Introduce myself as the facilitator.

Script: “Hi, I’m Stephanie Sanschagrín and I’ll be facilitating our interview today. During this process, I will be taking notes and recording our session.”

#### **Introductions**

Step 2: Why we are asking for their input. Purpose of the assessment. Review and collect informed consent forms.

Script: “Before we start there are a couple of things that we need to do, and I’d like to tell you a little bit about why we are here and how I will conduct the interview. Here is the consent form. I would like to tell you a little bit about the purpose of this interview and the process. I will need your signature on the form, which states that you are consenting to participate in this interview, but before you sign them, I’d like to review the form with you.”

#### **Pass out informed consent.**

Script: “Okay, now I’m going to read through the informed consent form with you. If you have any questions please stop me at any time.”

#### **Read through form, sign, and collect**

Step 3: Review the procedures and process for the interview.

Script: “In a minute, I’m going to ask you some open-ended questions and I’d like you to share your responses to them. Please share only the information you are comfortable sharing. Everything you say is strictly confidential—your real name will not be used at any time in the study. Please remember, you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering and that you can leave at any time.”

Script: “During the interview, I will not use your name, for the purpose of keeping your identity confidential.”

Script: “OK, are there any questions or concerns before we begin?” Address any questions or concerns.

### **Turn on Recorder**

Step 4. “We will now begin and I will turn on the recorder.”

Step 5. Start asking the questions. One at a time. The facilitator will use her judgment in deciding when to move on to the next question. Watch the time. Once the recorder is on:

Script: “Again I would like to extend my appreciation for your participation here today. I would like to start with some background information . . .

Q1. Please describe the format of the district leadership development program.

Q2. What parts of the leadership program were most important or purposeful to you?

Probe: Why do you think so?

Q3. Please describe how your knowledge of leadership development changed or grew throughout as a result of the program?

Q4. In relation to your own professional growth and development, what was the most beneficial part of the program?

Q5. Why do you think those parts of the experience benefited you the most?

Probe: Why do you think they were so?

Q6. What other topics or issues would you have liked to have learned about in this program?

Q7. Why do you think those parts of the experience benefited you the most?

Q8. If you could go back and go through the program again, would you?

Probe: Why? And if so would you change anything?

Q9. Based on your questionnaire, you participated in the leadership program \_\_\_\_\_. Do you think this program supported this advancement? (This question will only be asked if the participant's position has changed)

Q10. Did you bring a physical artifact? If so, can you please present it by explaining what it is and the meaning it holds for you in regard to your leadership development.

Script: “That was my final question. Is there anything else that you would like to add or any additional comments concerning what we have talked about here today?”

**Allow time for comments**

Script: “This concludes our interview. Thank you for coming and participating. Once we have conducted all of the interviews and analyzed the transcript, you will receive an e-mail asking you to comment on the conclusions we have drawn based on our analysis of the comments made during the interview discussion. If you have any questions at any time please contact me.”

## APPENDIX C

## INFORMED CONSENT

APPROVED FOR USE BETWEEN

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Version 8.22.18

## UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

## CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** Succession Planning for K–12 Leadership: Educators perceptions of a public school district leadership development program

**Principal Investigator(s):** Stephanie Sanschagrin

**Introduction:**

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this research study being done?**

Succession planning for K–12 leadership is the process of preparing teachers to become leaders within the organization (Succession Planning, 2015). To help school leaders and teachers prepare for future leadership demands, one school district in Arizona created and implemented a district-level program with the goal to develop teachers into leaders within the organization.

This study will explore the experience of those who participated in a district-level leadership training program and how participants perceive their growth as a leader as a result of their learning, and how they relate it to the concept and practice of succession planning.

**Who will be in this study?**

- You must be at least 18 years old
- You must be a teacher in (pseudonym) school district
- You must have taken part in the leadership development program offered by the district with the last 5 years.
-

**What will I be asked to do?**

- All participants of the study were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire through Google Forms. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked to engage in a semi-structured interview. If you agree to part take in an interview, you will be asked to bring a physical artifact the represents what leadership development means to you.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

- There are minimal, if any, foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
- If you experience any problems or discomfort related to the interview process it will be addressed immediately by the researcher and her advisory committee.
- Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not impact or affect your employment.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

- There are no direct benefits to taking part in this study.

**What will it cost me?**

- There are no costs affiliated with participation in this study.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

- All demographic information and interview question responses will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and stored and transcribed in Rev.com.
- All research records will be kept in a locked file in the locked home office of the principal investigator. As an added provision of privacy, the identity of participants will not be revealed at any time and pseudonyms or numbers will be assigned to research participants.
- All recordings from the research study will be destroyed after the interview is transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcript.
- Only the researcher's advisor and the IRB Committee at the University of New England have the right to review the study data.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

- Only the researcher, the researcher's dissertation committee, and the University of New England IRB will have access to the recordings and study data. The recordings will be deleted upon transcription of the interviews.

- Identifiable information in the data collected will be omitted. Participants will be given a pseudonym to maintain the confidentiality of individually identifiable interview transcripts and recordings.
- All research data will be physically destroyed or erased after the dissertation is completed and is deposited in the institutional repository of the University of New England.
- Consent forms will be stored in a secure location. A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the researcher for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed.

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the school district.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty for you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

### **What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

### **Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie Sanschagrin
  - For more information regarding this study, please contact me at (480) 779-8822 or [ssanschagrin@une.edu](mailto:ssanschagrin@une.edu)
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research-related injury, please contact Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Assistant Director of Curriculum and Research at (207) 221-4860 or [bparsons4@une.edu](mailto:bparsons4@une.edu)
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.
- 

## Participant's Statement

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

## Researcher's Statement

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

---

Researcher's signature

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Date

---

Printed name